

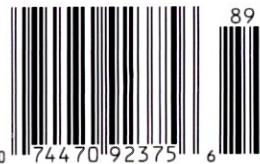
cineACTION

ISSUE 89 2012

3D
CGI

Powell
Scorsese
Godard
Schlöndorff
Toronto Festival

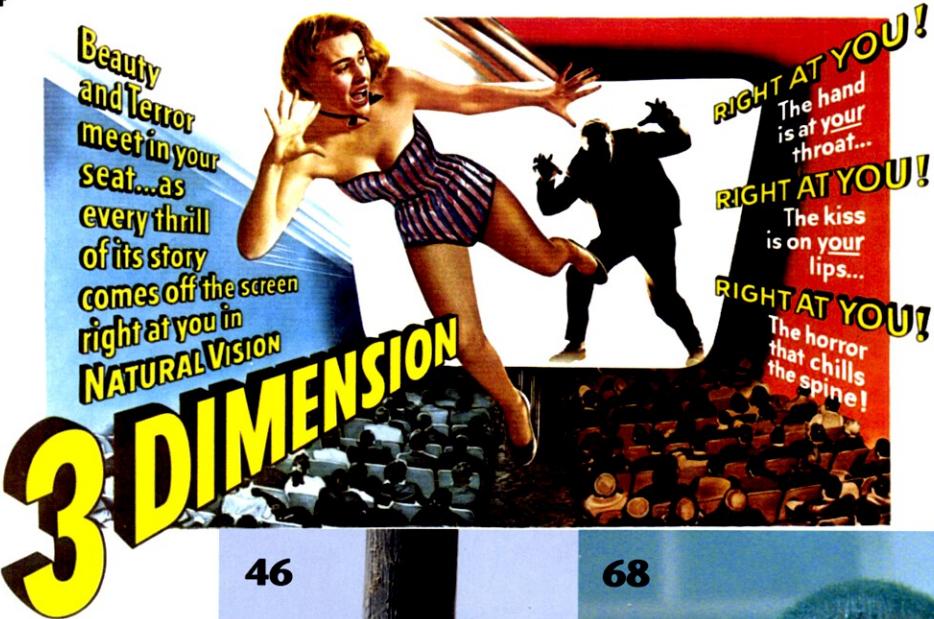
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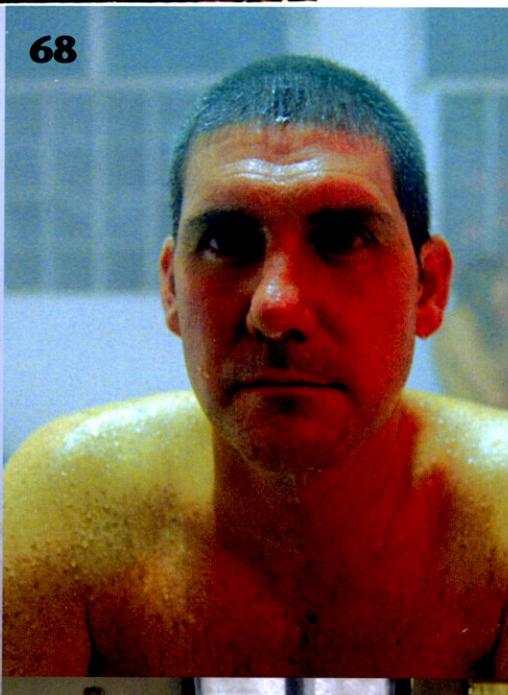
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3D & CGI

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

CINEACTION ISSUE 90

AUTHORSHIP

Our issue explores authorship in terms of the director's contribution to a film within the context of the collaborative process that defines filmmaking practice.

Authorship remains a relevant approach to film study. We welcome submissions dealing with the concept of authorship in both the classical and contemporary cinema.

Edited by Florence Jacobowitz fjacobs@yorku.ca and Richard Lippe rlippe@yorku.ca Please email any questions or interest to the editors. Submissions in hard copy mailed to the editors at 40 Alexander Street, #705, Toronto Ontario, Canada M4Y 1B5. A style guide is available on our website www.cineaction.ca

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 15, 2013

CINEACTION ISSUE 91

FILM+ART

This issue seeks to investigate the many variations on the relationship between Art and Film inherent in the joining together of the two words, and welcomes all interests and approaches.

Some possible topics, such as 'Film as (an) Art (Form)' and 'the Art Film' have been much-discussed nodes of inquiry in film studies. Documentaries on Artists (*Painters Painting, Never Sorry: Ai Weiwei, Gerhard Richter Painting*) and Artist Biopics, old (*Lust for Life, The Agony and the Ecstasy*) and more recent (*Basquiat, Pollock, Frida*), have proved popular over the years in their attempts to find narrative drama in an artist's life/technique/approach to art, or to merely find a way of presenting potentially difficult art to the general public. There are artist-made films, both experimental (Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, Andy Warhol), and those intended for commercial distribution (Robert Longo, David Salle, Julian Schnabel); and films like Banksy's *Exit through the Gift Shop* which blur the boundaries. In addition, there are artists (Christian Marclay, Omer Fast, Pipilotti Rist, Shirin Neshat) who use the medium of film/video for gallery-installed artwork.

Papers should be submitted in hard copy, mailed directly to Susan Morrison, the editor of this issue. Once accepted for publication, the paper will then be emailed as a file attachment.

It would be appreciated if a brief proposal be submitted as early as possible as an indication of intention to submit. A style guide is available on our website www.cineaction.ca Please address all queries and submissions to the issue's editor: Susan Morrison, 314 Spadina Road' Toronto ON, Canada M5R 2V6 smorr@cineaction.ca

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: May 15, 2013.

FRONT COVER IMAGE: *Tron Legacy*

BACK COVER IMAGE: *The Lives of Others*

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3D & CGI

This issue includes contributions on a fascinating range of films and themes. Our initial focus was on the spread of digitalizing technologies in filmmaking from 3D specifically to computer generated imaging pervasively.

Carter Moulton, Owen Weetch and Justin Morris consider, with differing emphasis and perspective, the emerging aesthetics of 3D and CGI in contemporary and historical examples.

Leighton Grist contributes a carefully detailed examination of influence and homage across the work of Michael Powell, Jean-Luc Godard and Martin Scorsese, concluding with the potentially baleful impact of both postmodernism and computer generated imagery, threatening once again 'the end of cinema as we have known it.'

Other articles take up films and filmmakers from a diverse selection of world cinema.

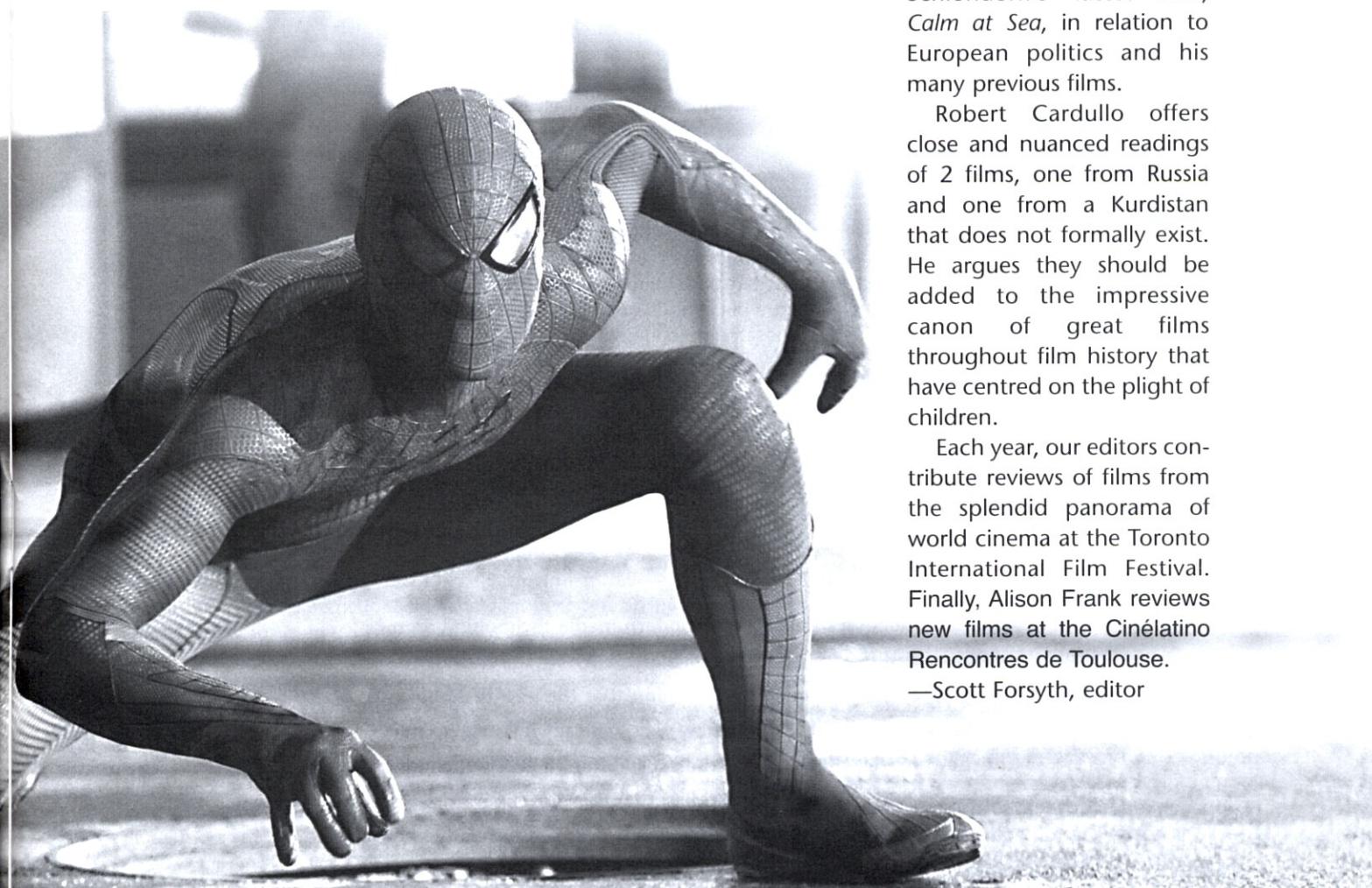
Allan MacInnis interviews 2 artists associated with the ebb and flow of filmmaking in British Columbia. Director Bruce Sweeney and actor Gabrielle Rose discuss the recent *Crimes of Mike Recket* and their past work in independent Canadian films.

George Lellis and Hans-Bernhard Moeller closely analyze Volker Schlöndorff's latest film, *Calm at Sea*, in relation to European politics and his many previous films.

Robert Cardullo offers close and nuanced readings of 2 films, one from Russia and one from a Kurdistan that does not formally exist. He argues they should be added to the impressive canon of great films throughout film history that have centred on the plight of children.

Each year, our editors contribute reviews of films from the splendid panorama of world cinema at the Toronto International Film Festival. Finally, Alison Frank reviews new films at the Cinélatino Rencontres de Toulouse.

—Scott Forsyth, editor



The Amazing Spider Man

The Future is a Fairground

Attraction and Absorption in 3D Cinema

By CARTER MOULTON

A pre-show advertisement currently running in AMC Theaters begins with three friends strolling into a brightly-lit theater. They take their seats, arms full with popcorn bags and Coca-Cola. As the film begins, their chairs slowly sprout vines, and the theater roof opens upward, exposing the night sky. Trees emerge from the walls; grass grows along the aisles; flowers poke up through the floor; a lightning bug flutters along. The three theatergoers find themselves in a Pandora-like world (*Avatar* (2009)), overlooking a hazy horizon. The letters "AMC" appear via searchlight in the purple sky.

Although the three friends in AMC's pre-show advertisement aren't wearing 3D glasses, Hollywood is currently marketing 3D technologies as a means of achieving this level of immersion. By paying a few more dollars for 3D glasses, audiences are promised a more realistic viewing experience. Or, as James Cameron told readers in an interview: "pay a couple of extra bucks and you get a little more sense of being there."¹ RealD, whose name confirms my claim, is the most widely used 3D technology in Hollywood. They promise to provide "ultra realistic images so lifelike you feel like you've stepped inside the movie."² This rhetoric and the AMC clip described above bring to mind Andre Bazin's notions of a "total cinema," wherein cinema's technological advances emerge from the desire to achieve an ultimate realism, a "perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief."³

Lev Manovich suggests, though, that we should place these marketing claims into an historical context:

"The introduction of every new modern media technology, from photography in the 1840s to virtual reality in the 1980s, has always been accompanied by the claims that the new technology allows to represent reality in a new way. Typically it is argued that the new representations are radically different from the ones made possible by older technologies; that they are superior to the old ones; and that they allow a more direct access to reality."⁴

NOTHING THAT HAS GONE BEFORE CAN COMPARE WITH THIS!

3 DIMENSION

WARNER BROS. BRING YOU THE FIRST FEATURE PRODUCED BY A MAJOR STUDIO IN 3D

"House of Wax"

WARNERCOLOR

Many scholars and critics have suggested that the resurgence of Hollywood 3D can be read as an effort to remain on top of today's ever-shifting media climate. Manovich suggests contemporary Hollywood's increasing reliance on computer effects and technology is "a reaction to the new competition of the Internet," specifically on-demand and internet streaming.⁵ Similarly, Roger Ebert, a well-known loather of 3D, notes that "whenever Hollywood has felt threatened it has turned to technology: sound, color, widescreen, Cinerama, 3D, stereophonic sound, and now 3D again."⁶ In "Machines of the Visible," Jean-Louis Comolli points to deep focus—the Bazinian aesthetic—as an example of how cinematic styles can "disappear or drop into oblivion" only to resurface later as "realistic" techniques.⁷ The fact that 3D technology itself has been substituted in and out of mainstream cinema—recall the "Golden Era of 3D" (1952–1955) and its brief revival in the 1980s—complicates this idea of a linear progression toward total realism.

Yet, interviews and articles surrounding upcoming Hollywood films seem to confirm art's journey toward a total, complete representation of reality. Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* trilogy is an apt example. Jackson, who shot *The Hobbit* in 3D

and 48 frames-per-second (fps) as opposed to the standard 24 fps, said in an interview that he is trying to "take away the artifacts that we're used to seeing in cinema," to provide a "much more realistic" viewing experience.⁸ Word recently broke that the film is also being released with Dolby Atmos sound technology, which promises to provide "a more natural and realistic sound-field, transporting [audiences] into the story with a life-like sensory experience."⁹ These new technologies, Jackson says, "allow audiences to leave their seats and sort of go into the film."¹⁰

This effort for an enhanced realism, though, has a strained relationship with the artificiality of Hollywood production. Of course, this is most plainly seen in Hollywood's infatuation with computer generated special effects and fantastical worlds, not to mention that many 3D releases are filmed in 2D and later converted into "fake 3D." Interestingly in the case of *The Hobbit*, Jackson's use of RED Epic 3D cameras at 48 fps both added and minimized artificiality in different areas of production. On the one hand, the camera's ability to capture minute details and textures forced the art department to abandon prop or "fake" materials (plastic in particular) in favor of metal and

ceramics. On the other, Jackson and his crew had to overcompensate for the RED Epic's strange color-rendering. The make-up department, for instance, had to "redder up the faces of the actors much more than usual because otherwise their skin colour will turn up yellow."¹¹

This strange artificiality-for-the-sake-of-realism would seem to disjoin it from Bazinian notions of progressive realism. That being said, I am not particularly interested in debunking Bazin's myth or confirming Comolli's theory. Constance Balides writes that these theories "are less appropriate theoretical points" when discussing digital cinema.¹² While this is true in some respects, I believe they still prove useful when thinking about 3D spectatorship, which is why I'll return to them later in this article.

I'd like to focus more closely, though, on the way 3D aesthetics are situated in a specific strand of new media theory. In an effort to identify the "new" within new media, many scholars suggest that emerging technologies often reinvigorate and reform pre-existing practices through a "combination of change and continuity over time."¹³ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, for instance, posit a process of remediation, in which new media is "in a constant dialectic with earlier media."¹⁴ Although he doesn't apply this notion to 3D—stereoscopic—images, Manovich also suggests that "new" technologies are usually not as new as they seem. That is, new technologies often "activate certain aesthetic impulses already established in the past."¹⁵ He traces two of these impulses—the use of special effects and documentary style—back to early cinema, calling Georges Méliès "the father of computer graphics" and likening the Lumières to digital video realists. Still, he is careful to point out that these aesthetics are not frozen in time.

In what follows, I build on Manovich's work by examining stereoscopic Hollywood cinema. Like Manovich and Barbara Klinger, whose work on Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) greatly influenced the direction of this article, I

connect contemporary 3D to early cinema (Méliès and Lumière, specifically). I also briefly touch on mid-20th century 3D. I examine two characteristics of the 3D image: its ability to bring elements of the diegesis into *our* world, and its ability to pull us into the *filmic* world. For the ease of clarification, I call the first effect the "outward aesthetic" and the second effect the "inward aesthetic."

Using Tom Gunning's work on the attraction, I suggest that these two aesthetics functioned most frequently and potently in the early cinema of attractions (through shocks, displays, and ride-simulations). These aesthetics, I argue, are being used today in contemporary 3D movies to create a similar "spectator of attractions," one who is cognizant of and interested in cinema's technological achievements in addition to (or rather than) than its story-telling capabilities. My goal here is to think about how time and technology might lead to what David Bordwell calls "an intensification of established techniques."¹⁶ With help from Leon Gurevitch, I conclude by suggesting that the continuation and amplification of these outward and inward aesthetics has also intensified Hollywood's reliance on the attraction in their marketing of 3D movies.

OUTWARD AESTHETICS

The Shock

The idea that cinematic objects could "pop out" or emerge outward from the two-dimensional screen is one that is linked to early cinema and Gunning's "cinema of attractions," which is largely considered to apply to most films predating 1906. With little effort we can trace this outward aesthetic back to 1896. The legend of Lumière's *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) at the Grand Café imagines a set of naive spectators who "reared back in their seats, or screamed, or got up and ran from the auditorium" due to fear of being run over by an oncoming train.¹⁷ (Lumière actually re-shot and re-presented



this film in stereoscopy to the French Academy of Sciences in 1935.) While research on this tale has revealed a less dramatic story, Stephen Bottomore concludes that audiences did indeed experience an “anxious or panicky reaction to films of approaching vehicles.”¹⁸ Gunning points to Maxim Gorky’s description of the film’s exhibition in 1896: “It speeds right at you—watch out! It seems as though it will plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you into a ripped sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones.”¹⁹

Seven years after Gorky’s account, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) threatened audiences not with an oncoming train but with a loaded pistol. The shot is described in the following excerpt from the Edison Films Catalogue, January 1904:

Scene 14—Realism. Full frame of Barnes, leader of the outlaw band, taking aim and firing point blank at the audience. The resulting excitement is great. This section of the scene can be used either to begin the subject or to end it, as the operator may choose.²⁰

Why does this early advertisement describe the most confrontational, presentational moment of the film as pure realism? While we need to be careful not to oversimplify Gunning’s attraction as being synonymous with shock or uncomfortableness, these aesthetics are very much a part of the cinema of attractions and work to produce an “exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption.”²¹ Here, both the oncoming train and the barrel of Barnes’ gun are the objects of display insofar as they threaten the viewer with protrusion, outward from the screen.

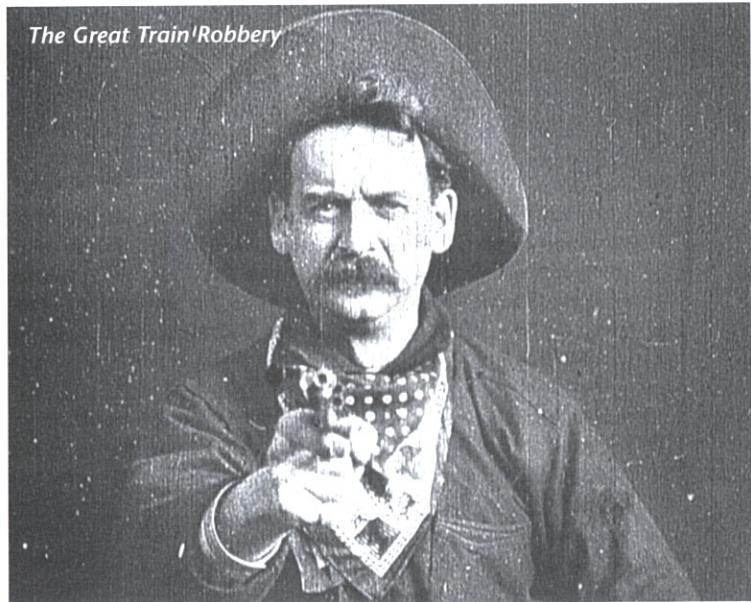
With the 3D boom in the 1950s, filmgoers continued to encounter these outward aesthetics. A scene from *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) features David and Mark scuba-hunting for the evil Creature. The camera is positioned so that they swim directly toward us. Immediately after the Creature performs a surprisingly human-like backstroke, a harpoon is raised and fired into the camera—“into the theater.” This shot is repeated less than a minute later, and it is a frequent occurrence for guns, lamps, and rocks to be pointed or thrust toward the viewer throughout the film.

The contemporary 3D spectator is also being bombarded with these outward shock aesthetics. Within the last decade, audiences have been shocked by lightning (*Spy Kids 3D: Game Over* (2003)); attacked by a school of piranhas (*Piranha 3D* (2010) and *Piranha 3DD* (2012)); splintered by glowing Identity Discs (*Tron: Legacy* (2010)); cracked by whips (*A Christmas Carol* (2009)); pummeled by exploding asteroids (*Superman Returns* (2006)); paralyzed by spells (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (2011)); and impaled by pickaxes (*My Bloody Valentine 3D* (2009)), among others. Like *The Great Train Robbery*, a scene in *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010) positions us in the line of fire. Here, 3D depth leaves less to the imagination of the spectator by intensifying the sensation of protrusion from the screen. As the camera retreats in slow motion, though, it is revealed that these bullets are caught by zombie skulls.

As Gunning has frequently reminded us, shock aesthetics and attractions are not confined to early cinema and remain “a component of narrative films” such as *Resident Evil: Afterlife*.²² While this is undoubtedly true, I think it proves useful to reform the notion that attractions are necessarily supplanted by narrative. How are these films being sold to audiences? It’s a question I return to in my conclusion.



L'Arrivée d'un train en gare



The Great Train Robbery

The Showman

The showmanship of Méliès serves as an appropriate analogy to describe another, less threatening, form of the outward aesthetic—one that has been more dramatically intensified by 3D. Many Méliès films feature a showman (often Méliès himself) presenting a series of tricks—self-decapitations, vanishings, transformations, and the like. Through the showman’s movement and minimal mise en scène, spectators are encouraged to look at the object of display and appreciate what Gunning calls the “cinematic gesture of presentation.”²³ These presentational aesthetics often take place on filmed stages or flattened sets and thus aren’t particularly concerned with illusions of outward or inward movement (an exception comes to mind in *The Big Swallow* (1901)).

One popular scene in *House of Wax* (1953) features a showman who eerily resembles Méliès and, like him, confronts the theater audience as part of a cinematic trick. As he toys with a paddle ball on the streets outside the wax museum, we see the paddle ball move back and forth in space perpendicular to the screen—it appears to pop in and out of the space of the theater. He continues his routine:



Watch it young lady! Careful sir. Keep your head down, or I'll tap you on the chin. Look out, duck!...Well there's someone with a bag of popcorn. Close your mouth, it's the bag I'm aiming at—not your tonsils! Here she comes! Well look at that, It's in the bag!²⁴

Through its direct-address dialogue and camera positioning, this scene temporarily suspends the narrative. By “stressing the actual act of display,” the paddle-ball scene utilizes 3D as a tool to present a cinematic object to the viewer.²⁵ Returning to Manovich’s notion that technological innovation might simultaneously activate and alter old aesthetic impulses, we can say that this use of 3D revives the presentational aesthetics of early cinema while heightening the illusion of protrusion. The stereoscopic variant of the outward aesthetic, in other words, contradicts Christian Metz’s claim that spectacles occur “as if an invisible but airtight partition were keeping” the diegesis and the movie theater “totally isolated from each other.”²⁶ It creates the illusion of a transdiegetic object.

Current 3D seems intent on displaying one or two transdiegetic objects at a time. Take a scene from *The Polar Express* (2003), in which a boy loses his train ticket en route to the North Pole. The ticket slips from his hand and floats alongside the moving train; after it settles to the snow, a pack of wolves run by and kick it back into the air; an eagle catches it in its mouth and feeds it to her baby. Eventually, the ticket miraculously returns to the train car through an open door. This three-minute scene in no way furthers the narrative; the transdiegetic ticket ends up where it began. Other examples of transdiegetic objects include the Queen’s crown in *Alice In Wonderland* (2010), two colliding bubbles in the opening scene of *Avatar*, a levitating pocket-knife in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and sheets of Méliès’ conceptual art in *Hugo* (2011).

These moments often employ shallow focus or a rack-focus

to present certain objects as nearer to the spectator than the rest of the blurry and unreachable diegesis in which they are situated. In this way, they seem to puncture the “airtight partition” which Metz describes. So, while more threatening forms of outward aesthetics have certainly been intensified by 3D, presentational aesthetics have become outward.

INWARD AESTHETICS

Riding

Reading about the cinema of attractions evokes the smell of hot dogs and sea air, images of long, winding lines, men in straw boaters and women in feathered hats, ferris wheels and lights—these were the atmosphere of early cinema exhibition. And, no aesthetic links the attraction of the fairground and the multiplex movie theater more tightly than the “phantom ride.” In early phantom-ride films, filmmakers mounted a camera on the front (or back) of a train to provide a first-person perspective, one which creates the illusion of transporting a viewer onto the moving train.

In *Passage d'un tunnel en chemin de fer* (1898), the Lumières attach a camera to the front of a moving train as it approaches and emerges from a dark tunnel. While the train’s movement is relatively slow and straightforward, the sensation of movement is enhanced by our seeming ingestion of railroad and the interlaced nature of the bridge it traverses through. “Hale’s Tours of the World,” which emerged in the 1900s, supplemented this phantom-ride imagery with sounds of train whistles and moving platforms that were furnished as railway carriages. Geoff King frames the Hale’s Tours as an early attempt to create “motion simulation illusions”—what Hollywood is now advertising as “4D”—and a predecessor for the Hollywood film-based attractions found at Universal Studios and Disneyland.²⁷

As I mentioned above, the thrill of these phantom rides hinges on their ability to create the illusion of transporting the spectator onto a moving vehicle. The thrill a spectator might

feel is the result of the illusion or simulation of movement through a filmic world. Yet, because early cinema phantom rides lack narrative, it seems problematic to suggest that they transported spectators into a fully formed diegesis.

Like other attraction aesthetics, those of the "ride" variety have continued to appear in films, usually during quickly-paced action montages. Most popularly, *Rollercoaster* (1977) folded extended phantom-ride sequences into a thriller-suspense narrative. This intense inward immersion, though, extends beyond just "being on the ride." The same sort of kinesthetic spectacle can be achieved by placing a camera slightly behind characters as they zoom through filmic space. Constance Balides explores this phenomenon through the "movie ride" film:

The immersion effect in mainstream film now...generally works through imaginary emplacement of the spectator in the world of the film achieved through textual strategies such as placement of the camera in the literal position of a character (a point of view shot) or one associated with the purported character's view as well as special effects zoom shots...suggesting movement inward into the image.²⁸

Writing in 2003, Balides suggests that Hollywood's newfound interest in 3D "may change cinematic immersion" through a "more intense perceptual transformation of the physical position of the spectator."²⁹ It has indeed. Recent 3D movies love to hurl spectators onto moving vehicles—a train in *Hugo*, a snipe in *Up* (2009), a scooter in *Bolt* (2011), a Barsoomian spacecraft in *John Carter* (2012)—or just behind a rapidly-moving subject—a flying Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, a dragon in *How To Train Your Dragon* (2010), Tintin's motorcycle in *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011), Ghost Rider's motorcycle in *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* (2011). Even the body can be vehicle-ized when it's leaping and slinging its way across New

York City (*The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012)). Two aforementioned 3D films, *The Polar Express* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, provide the best examples of how this inward ride aesthetic has been intensified. As *The Polar Express* roars toward the North Pole and Harry plunges into the depths of Gringotts Bank, Lumière's train-ride aesthetic is amplified in three ways: the speeds are faster, the grades steeper, and the perspectives closer to the track.

I'm hesitant to make the claim that 3D is the main reason for the re-emergence of these phantom-ride aesthetics, mostly because all of the films listed above are more or less action-oriented, and many of them are entirely computer-generated. Both of these conditions make them more likely to feature some form of inward ride aesthetic. Currently, though, *these are the only type of Hollywood 3D film to analyze*. So, while the extent of this ride-aesthetic revitalization is unclear, it is unquestionably true that almost all contemporary 3D films are employing it. Often too, these ride sequences are elongated and repeated within the course of the film.

Roaming

The inward aesthetics I'm exploring are a result of forward camera movement through filmed space. "Camera movements," Klinger writes, "that call attention to their own visibility better accentuate the viewer's awareness of the recession or progression of space or of its sheer magnitude."³⁰ And so, contemporary 3D films often feature a "conspicuously active camera."³¹ But, how is the inward aesthetic functioning at a peaceful pace?

Slowing down the camera's movement certainly opens up a temporal space for the viewer to visually explore the image. I point this out because most all of the outward *and* inward aesthetics I've discussed so far discourage a visual exploration of the image; their effects function through a direct hold on the viewer's gaze. Whether an object is being thrown at us or we find ourselves moving speedily through filmic space, these 3D



aesthetics bring forth visceral, instinctual reactions on the part of the spectator. By combining 3D with deep focus, long takes, and slow inward camera movement, filmmakers can detach these guided gazes and invite a more Bazinian spectator. These, I would argue, are the form of inward aesthetics that 3D might put to use should it want to absorb audiences and set them free in a diegesis.

Currently, though, filmmakers are positing this absorption as non-spatial, equating depth with emotion rather than with spatial exploration. Robert Neuman, stereoscopic supervisor on *Bolt*, writes that he and his team tried to produce "a restrained and story-serving use of stereoscopic depth."³² A "depth score"—like a musical score—is made to reflect the emotional content of the film, wherein "the emotional impact of the film's content was proportional to the stereoscopic depth being presented."³³ This means that greater depth intensities were reserved for the "big moments in the film."³⁴ In addition to those quoted in this article, many other filmmakers have expressed interest in immersing the audience through 3D technology. But, it remains rather unclear whether they are interested in transporting us into the space of diegetic worlds or into the affect of diegetic characters.

Pete Kozachik, director of photography on *Coraline* (2009), notes that he and director Henry Selick utilized 3D to add "scope and excitement without nuking the eyeballs," to help "immerse the audience [into their] handcrafted worlds."³⁵ (The word "worlds" is plural here because *Coraline* features a heroine who stumbles upon an almost-parallel world—a twisted, fantastical, nightmarish space.) By "immerse," Kozachik is referring to an emotional immerion. He continues:

We all agreed 3-D had to be used to enhance story and mood, like any other photo technique... Henry wanted 3D depth to differentiate the Real World from the Other World, specifically in sync with what *Coraline* is feeling... We found that a setting receding deeply behind the screen creates a sense of space and freedom and is more effective at evoking pleasant feelings than bringing everything out into the theater. You might notice this in *Coraline*'s establishing shots, interior as well as exterior. Sometimes we did the opposite, crowding images into theater space to invoke claustrophobia or discomfort.³⁶

Bordwell also speaks of this affective immersion, noting the "inconsistent" depth cues of the Real world compared to a more naturalistic depth in the Other World.³⁷ So here, again, 3D is being mobilized as a sort of stereoscopic expressionism. I wonder if this emphasis on emotional immersion rather than spatial exploration is due to the ludic, explorative features of video games. Have they freed cinema, like the painting and photograph before it, from its pursuit of total realism?

Despite the unclear rhetoric from filmmakers and their Bazinian implications, a few moments in *Coraline* undoubtedly work to absorb us into the *mise en scène*. These usually occur when Coraline is in her Other World. Let's analyze a moment when Coraline first wanders into a magical garden in her Other World. The scene begins with a shot of the garden from afar. As Coraline enters through the gate, we are met with a few outward aesthetics—a frog's appearance startles both us and Coraline. Yet, these give way to a deep composition, and as Coraline ascends the bricked stairs of the garden, we are free to

visually roam the grounds: *Coraline*, the luminous vegetation, the orange hummingbird, the surrounding architecture, and the stars beyond are equally crisp. The camera follows *Coraline*, slowly tracking and panning while preserving a sense of continuous time and space.

Through a multiplicity of layers, Kozachik and Selick create the phenomenon of a vaster visual space to explore, which encourages "a more active mental attitude" on the part of the spectator.³⁸ In her analysis of *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, Klinger suggests that Werner Herzog's incorporation of 3D, deep focus and traveling shots provide the spectator with a similar sensation—the "vicarious experience of cave exploration."³⁹ Klinger carefully frames the complementary use of these aesthetics as having a "double impact" of realism and of spectacle. While a heightened realism is achieved through the preservation of continuous time and space, there is also constructed a spectacle of "the majesty and exhilaration of highly self-conscious presentations of space."⁴⁰ Although this roaming form of inward aesthetic is difficult to analyze without a 3DTV, the examples above attest to way in which Bazinian aesthetics might be intensified by 3D.

CONCLUSION: Selling 3D

Thus far I've outlined the way stereoscopic technology might be used to remediate or amplify existing aesthetic impulses. Outward aesthetics continue to be used as attractions, either to shock the audience or display to them a transdiegetic object. Inward aesthetics are also being propelled in this direction through a continuation of the ride aesthetic. While it seems that some filmmakers are thinking of 3D immersion as emotional (depth scores) rather than spatial (visual exploration), another form of inward aesthetic incorporates Bazinian techniques, stereoscopic layering, and slow inward camera movement. To the degree which editing and framing allow, this opens up a space for spectatorial exploration of a diegetic world.

Gunning writes that certain genres (comedies, musicals) are more friendly to the attraction. As mentioned above, most all of the contemporary 3D films listed above (with the exception of *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, which was an independent release) are action-oriented films about journeying to, escaping from, or battling in faraway lands and times. Gunning suggests that in these genres, attractions can actually "threaten to mutiny" and overtake the dominance of narrative.⁴¹ But, I'm not sure how useful this question of genre is moving forward. We might place it on the shelf for now, readying it for the future to see if 3D finds its way into other genres like courtroom dramas, psychological thrillers, romantic comedies, or period dramas (perhaps *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* and upcoming releases like *The Great Gatsby* (2013) and *Gravity* (2013) are gestures in that direction).

I propose we shift our focus from certain attraction-friendly genres to the marketing techniques of Hollywood. How are these films being sold to audiences? Could it be as King suggests, that today's multiplex theaters are modern fairgrounds, the 21st century's "equivalent of the early cinema of attractions?"⁴² Undoubtedly, the first uses of mainstream stereoscopy were advertised as pure attractions. A promotional poster for *House of Wax* (1953) reads:

Warner Bros. bring you the first feature produced by a major studio in 3D! Nothing that has gone before can compare with this! Beauty and Terror meet in

your seat...as every thrill of its story comes off the screen right at you in Natural Vision 3 Dimension! Right at you! The hand is at your throat... Right at you! The kiss is on your lips... Right at you! The horror that chills the spine!⁴³

These words are sprinkled around the image of a movie theater, and a half-naked woman appears to be lunging out from the screen toward the audience. The rhetoric of this poster points to 3D and the experience of viewing—and not the film itself—as the main draw. In doing so, it invites a spectator of attractions, one who, like the early cinema spectator, goes to the theatre to “see machines demonstrated (the newest technological wonder)... rather than to view films.”⁴⁴

And with Hollywood’s recent addiction to remakes and re-releases in 3D (*Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Alice In Wonderland*, *Saw 3D* (2010), *The Lion King 3D* (2011), *Monster’s Inc. 3D* (2012), *Titanic 3D* (2012), *Toy Story 3D* (2012), *Silent Hill: Revelation 3D* (2012), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3D* (2013), *Jurassic Park 3D* (2013) etc.), is it so clear that narrative maintains dominance over stereoscopic technology? What kind of spectatorship is Hollywood constructing through these 3D re-releases? Doesn’t the fact that “3D” remains in the title of these stereo-

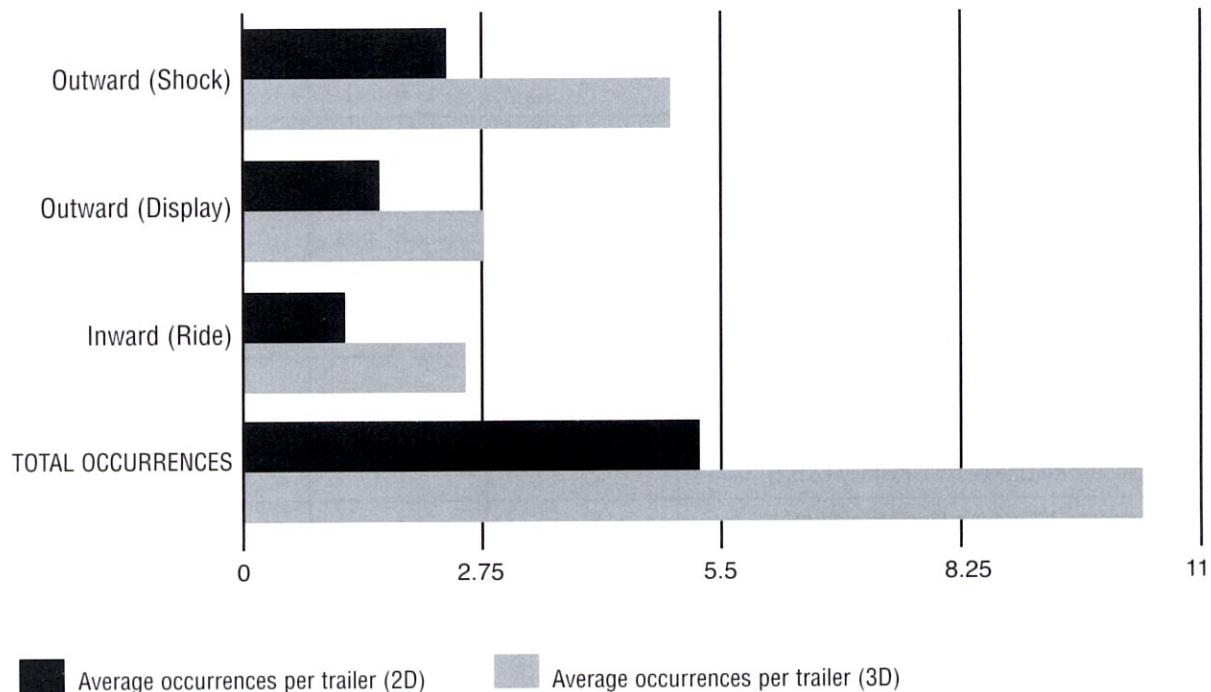
scopic films suggest that attraction and narrative and being equally emphasized? These titles, which downplay narrative, evoke the exhibitionism of Méliès, whose stories were self-admittedly nothing more than “a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema.”⁴⁵

Leon Gurevitch uses the term “cinemas of transactions” to describe the relationship between the attraction and its promotional use. He builds on Bottomore’s work to suggest that early accounts of oncoming-train films (*L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat*, Edison’s *The Black Diamond Express* (1896)) “were most likely exaggerated precisely because they served a promotional function that benefited all involved.”⁴⁶ Simply put, spectacle sells. Gurevitch argues that today’s digital attractions “are constructed to operate across multiple textual forms as both attractions and advertisements simultaneously.”⁴⁷ Among other salient examples, he points to the theatrical poster for *Titanic* (1997), which is essentially a freeze frame from the film’s most expensive, expansive, CGI-driven scene. Here, the attraction is not merely used to immerse or entertain; it is used to “sell” the film to the viewer.

To examine how 3D films might be selling their attractions, I looked at the theatrical trailers for 25 contemporary non-re-release 3D films (2003–2012) and 25 similar 2D films released

Inward and Outward Aesthetics in Theatrical Trailers

Sample size: 50 film trailers



Occurrences of Inward and Outward Aesthetics in Theatrical Trailers 3D (2003–2012)

Title (In Order of Release Year)	outward (shock)	outward (display)	inward (ride)	Total Occurrences
Spy Kids 3D: Game Over (2003)	12	4	5	21
The Polar Express (2004)	0	4	10	14
Bolt (2008)	6	1	0	7
Journey to the Center of the Earth (2008)	5	3	6	14
A Christmas Carol (2009)	3	3	4	10
Avatar (2009)	7	1	3	11
Coraline (2009)	1	12	1	14
My Bloody Valentine 3D (2009)	8	2	0	10
Up (2009)	3	4	0	7
Alice In Wonderland (2010)	5	4	2	11
How to Train Your Dragon (2010)	9	3	5	17
Piranha 3D (2010)	4	3	0	7
Resident Evil: Afterlife (2010)	8	1	3	12
Saw 3D (2010)	10	0	1	11
Shrek Forever After (2010)	4	4	4	12
Toy Story 3 (2010)	4	1	4	9
Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance (2011)	4	5	1	10
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 (2011)	10	1	4	15
Hugo (2011)	1	1	2	4
Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter (2012)	8	4	1	13
The Amazing Spider-Man (2012)	0	1	2	3
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012)	2	1	0	3
Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted (2012)	5	3	2	10
Piranha 3DD (2012)	5	2	5	12
Silent Hill: Revelation 3D (2012)	2	2	0	4
Average occurrences per theatrical trailer	5.0	2.8	2.6	10.4

near the beginning of 3D's resurgence into Hollywood cinema (1999–2006). I then marked down the frequency to which these aesthetics were showcased in the promotional trailers. I focused on the three stereoscopic aesthetic subcategories (outward: shock, outward: display, and inward: ride) that most clearly intensify the early cinema attraction. Because I don't have a 3DTV, admittedly, I worked from 2D trailers and my memory of these films' 3D screenings. This presents a challenge in analyzing 3D techniques, and I have a newfound respect for all scholars writing before the VCR.

As the graph above shows, I noted a slight increase in each aesthetic category, which led to a more noticeable increase (a doubling) in overall occurrences per trailer. This suggests that trailers for 3D films are featuring an increased amount of easily-recognizable inward and outward aesthetics—Gurevitch's notions of a "cinemas of transactions" at work. Of the 25 3D movie trailers I watched (see previous data tables), four of them depicted a theater audience wearing 3D glasses and physically responding to a protruding image—a move that cultivates a certain aura around the 3D theatergoing experience. With this quick and rather amusing look at film trailers, I hope to illustrate that while filmmakers, studio executives, and technology suppliers are expressing a desire to "put down the paddle ball aimed at the camera" and "pull the viewer deeper into the experience," other paratextual material (the title of the films, the nature of their release, their theatrical trailers and posters) are actively marketing an amplified attraction.⁴⁸

I'd like to conclude by clarifying a few things. I am not suggesting that these inward and outward aesthetic categories and subcategories (shock, display, ride, roam) are the only way to think about 3D aesthetics; nor am I suggesting that every frame of a 3D film is employing them; nor am I saying that outward and inward aesthetics are mutually exclusive. They most certainly interact with one another and amalgamate throughout the course of a single film. As I have tried to illustrate, though, a potent outward aesthetic posits a spectator of attractions, a viewer whose adrenaline surges from the thought of filmic objects crashing into the theater or protruding from the screen. The inward aesthetic seems to work toward diegetic absorption by extending the back wall of the theater, but it too has been made a vehicle for the attraction through the phantom-ride aesthetic. With much of this work, I'm quite content to risk being overly-categorical if it means opening up a space for future work to interrogate the tensions between theories of cinematic realism, Hollywood's marketing of 3D, and the images we see in the theater.

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Reading Parallax

3D MEANING CONSTRUCTION IN *THE HOLE*



BY OWEN WEECH

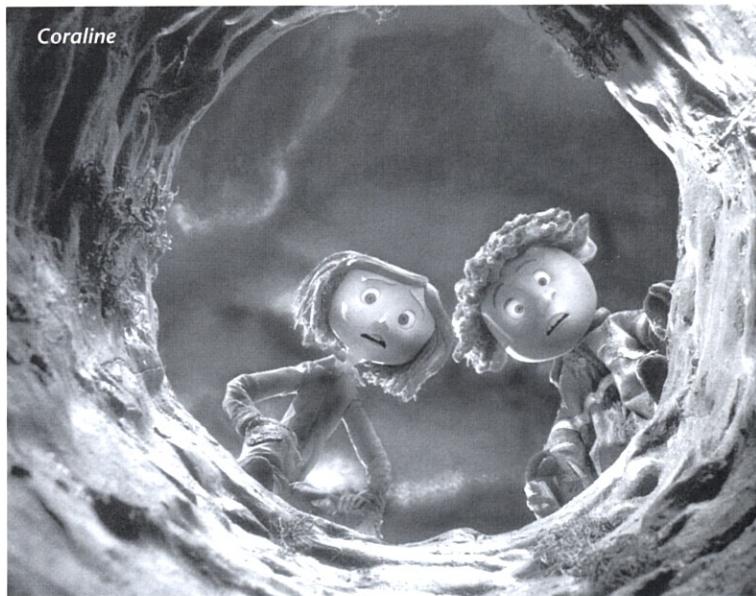
In 'The Aesthetics of Emergence', William Paul holds that "negative parallax"—moving diegetic objects out from behind the screen and into the audience space—can distract audiences because "breaking out of a frame calls attention to the frame that is being violated."¹ Scott Higgins' recent '3D in Depth: *Coraline*, *Hugo*, and a Sustainable Aesthetic' argues that while the "overt and protrusive 3D" of exploitation horror films like *My Bloody Valentine 3D* (2009) and *Piranha 3D* (2010) demonstrates that such genres offer "greater diegetic lassitude", "quality film must not smell of the fairground."² (This poses a potential problem for 'quality' cinema: for Paul, "if 3-D has never left the fairground, then the fairground never quite left 3-D."³) For Higgins, "a restrained, depth-oriented aesthetic has developed as a more respectable and sustainable option." The "animated family film", trading as it does "in broad and self-conscious humor and strongly sympathetic characters", suggests to Higgins "a safe arena" for the process: "ambitious filmmakers can test the process's spectacular and narrative potentials without fear of driving away high-minded adults."⁴

For Higgins, the stop-motion animation *Coraline* (2009) is a film that benefits from "the aesthetic roominess of the animated family film". He praises its "flamboyant depth effects" for remaining "anchored to character experience"⁵: in the film's 'real world' diegesis, which the titular protagonist finds cloying, the inter-ocular distance, or IoD (which accounts for the amount of stereoscopic depth in any given shot and is subject to the distance between the two camera lenses) is kept disproportionately minimal and constricting, at odds with the more extreme IoD used to represent the fantastical "Other World." As Higgins puts it, "3D volume and depth, controlled by varying the IoD during shooting, was thus functionalised in parallel to well-established expressive registers like lighting and colour."⁶ For Higgins, negative parallax is mostly deployed in order to emphasise "a plunging trajectory into the screen, inverting the more routine gimmick of protrusion."⁷ He cites the example a button falls which begins emergent but falls back into the depths of positive parallax.

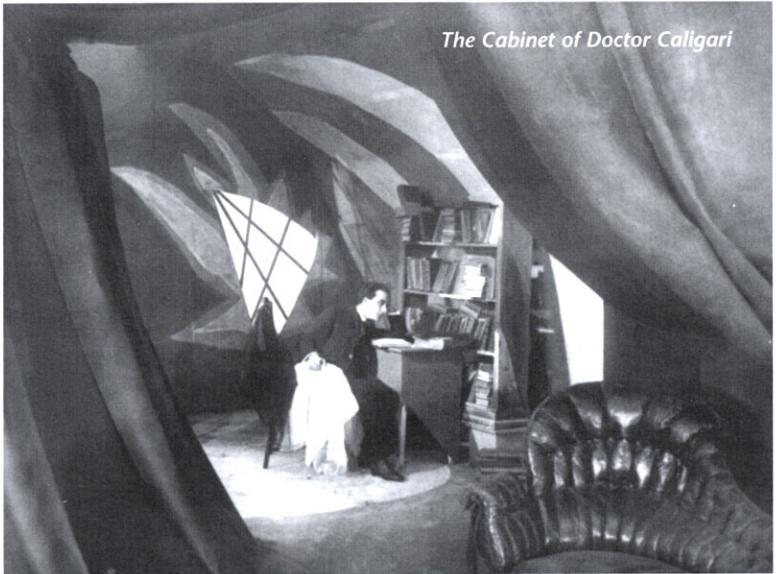
The Hole (2009), however, demonstrates that pronounced negative parallax can be read as an "expressive register" in its own right and as a way of contributing to meaning construction. There may, admittedly, be a certain "aesthetic roominess" involved: though live-action, it is still, like *Coraline*, a family horror film, with many special effects and fantastical situations. Its director, Joe Dante, chose *The Hole* as his next project because the script's "emphasis on characters really stuck out" for him: "It's [...] psychological, and [...] more attuned to the idea of doing some spatial relationship kind of things in 3D."⁸ *The Hole*, then, is, like *Coraline*, a text that uses 3D in a manner "anchored to character experience."⁹ Putting to one side questions of distraction, this piece will explore a key sequence in the film in order to demonstrate that negative parallax can in fact contribute to meaning construction, expressively extending the diegesis outwards rather than simply chucking objects out of it. The stereoscopic area in front of the screen—which Paul's work suggests can be termed "the *plateau*"¹⁰—can be used as a structuring element, working alongside and in conjunction with the space behind it—for Paul, the *locus*¹¹—to nuance and accentuate the representation of a character's journey towards adulthood.

The film's narrative is as follows: Dane Thompson is a surly teenager who moves from New York to a quiet suburban town with his mother, Susan, and his younger brother, Lucas. Dane

only spends time with Lucas grudgingly, resentful of his mother's requests for him to, quite literally, "play ball" with him. Dane, Lucas, and their next door neighbour Julie discover a seemingly-bottomless hole covered by a trapdoor in the Thompsons' basement. Each of the three is then individually menaced by different apparitions until Dane discovers that if you "look in the hole, it knows you somehow [and] it brings your fears to life." Lucas is menaced by a clown puppet and Julie by the ghost of a young girl whom she accidentally let fall to her death when the two of them were playing on a rollercoaster in an abandoned amusement park several years before. Dane initially maintains that he isn't afraid of anything, but begins to notice stray beer cans and belt buckles left about the house. While Lucas and Julie manage to face and master their fears, Dane's pretence is shattered when a tall figure kidnaps Lucas, dragging the young boy down into the hole. Dane follows the two of them and the kidnapper is revealed to be a manifestation of the boys' father, whose original incarnation is, Dane reveals to Julie, still in prison for "beat[ing] the crap out of [Dane and Lucas] every night." Upon falling to the bottom of the hole, Dane finds himself in a world that resembles the New York of his childhood, as large and imposing to him now as it was when he was a small child. There he confronts a nightmarish manifestation of his father, unnaturally colossal in size and his face shrouded in darkness. Dane realises that his father's violence stemmed from fear (which was also presumably the cause of his



The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari



heavily-implied alcoholism). He realises that his father is not as big as this manifestation, telling 'Mr. Thompson' that he "only looked that way because [Dane] was little." The father's apparition begins to diminish in size as Dane confronts his fears. Eventually he seems to threaten to hit his father with the belt, and who leers back at him: "Like father, like son." Dane, affronted and unwilling to resort to violence in the way that his father did, tells 'Mr. Thompson' that he is "nothing like" him and uses the belt to instead hook himself to a ceiling fan whose cable he uses to climb out of the hole as his assailant falls into nothingness. Dane and Lucas emerge from the hole, which then mysteriously closes over with gravel. Dane, Julie, Lucas and Susan go outside to play basketball.

The film, then, is concerned with questions of maturity: Dane becomes more responsible and embraces his role as Lucas' older brother through a rejection of the fear and resultant violence that overcame his father. The final sequence is comprised of three stages: Dane in thrall to his fears and his realisation that unless he masters them he could end up like his father; the Dane telling his younger brother that he will allow no harm to come to him and so becoming qualified to act in a protective capacity; Dane mastering his fears in a final stand-off, conquering 'Mr. Thompson' through a refusal to resort to violence. This article will demonstrate that the representation of each stage is dependent on negative parallax for its full effect.

Expressive Emergence

The first stage in the sequence shows Dane entering a space that resembles the New York apartment of his childhood. The set design is warped, forcing perspective and manipulating object size to suggest the vantage point of a child. The *mise-en-scène*'s distension of reality recalls *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, which Dante has noted was an influence on the film.¹² (Higgins speaks of *Coraline*'s similarity to this film in terms of set design, noting that sets in that film "are consistently skewed by contradictory depth cues", a process "amplified" through the use of 3D.¹³) A shot where Dane approaches a gargantuan cupboard where in childhood he used to hide from his father is shot from overhead: Dane is in long shot at the top half of the frame looking up at the cupboard's door which towers above him and occupies the bottom half of the frame, so that the uppermost portion of the

door splays out onto the *platea*. In his article 'Making Up Monsters: Set and Costume Design in Horror Film', Tamao Nakahara quotes Thomas Elsaesser's work on the melodrama to posit that a horror film too "can use setting and décor so as to reflect the characters' fetishistic fixations" with the result that "violent feelings are given vent on 'overdetermined' objects [...] and aggressiveness is worked out by proxy."¹⁴ The cupboard door and the violence it represents loom large in Dane's consciousness, and are further 'overdetermined' through the door's presentation in negative parallax. *Dial M For Murder* shows that overdetermination through emergence has precedent: Sheldon Hall notes that certain objects in that film are brought beyond the screen in order to emphasise their narrative importance. Hall argues this is because "3-D gives a greater physical 'presence' and dramatic force to [the object in question] than would otherwise be the case."¹⁵

Perhaps the most striking example of such 'stereodetermination' in *The Hole*'s final sequence occurs when Dane walks down the corridor past a series of framed family photographs from his past. There is a close-up of the pictures that steadily tracks from right to left, in what is essentially Dane's point of view as he walks along looking at them. During this shot the two lenses of the camera converge on the pictures, putting them stereoscopically level with the screen plane and guiding attention towards them. In these images, the face of Mr. Thompson is blurred beyond all recognition. The camera carries on tracking left and then tilts down, coming to rest on a table set against the wall littered with broken beer bottles and a half-eaten takeaway pizza. Because lenses remain converged on the wall upon which the pictures hang, the table, pizza, and broken bottles—all jutting out away from the wall—emerge forcefully out onto the *platea*.

Pizza, related to the film's contrast irresponsibility and maturity, recurs throughout the film. Dane is shown eating pizza throughout the film, with each appearance of the foodstuff expressing the degree of similarity or difference between his behaviour and his father's in relation to Lucas at that point. Pizza first appears when he refuses to play catch with his sibling, intent instead on listening to music and texting, admitting to his mother that were he to spend any more time with Lucas he'd probably "strangle" him. Later on in the film, Dane, Julie and Lucas order pizza when Susan is away for the evening. The last time he ate pizza he ignored his brother; this time he shares the food and converses with him. However, its takeaway nature insinuates tentativeness: it is implied that the only reason they're ordering pizza is that there is not a parent present to cook for them (Dane tells Lucas that Susan will not be home "til midnight"). Pizza, then, is firstly associated with Dane's irresponsible behaviour toward his sibling, and secondly with attempts at inhabiting a family unit—albeit ones that are tentative at best and remain tethered to immaturity. When the foodstuff appears, covered in shattered beer bottles, on the nightmare space's table, it also becomes associated with Mr Thompson, whose presence has up until recently been insinuated through the appearance of empty beer cans. The implication that Dane could yet become like his father is made even more explicit through thrusting this intersection of expressive elements out onto the *platea*. The photographs take on a new dimension in retrospect, the obfuscated faces' blurred identity insidiously suggesting that they could well be morphing into images of Dane. *The Hole*, then, uses emergence in order to accentuate the expressive synthesis of leitmotifs, 'stereodetermining' them so that their presentation carries even more force.



Size Matters

Shots throughout the sequence use a combination of set design, shot composition, and stereoscopy in order to miniaturise Dane, a visual metaphor representing the extent to which he is subject to fear of his father.

A long aerial shot that shows Dane standing in the middle of the Thompsons' old living room most overtly initiates this formal strategy. The living room is another example of expressionist set design, consisting of a gigantic sofa in the background, placed against the rear wall (whose windows are triangular rather than rectangular, as if seen by a child). There is a gargantuan coffee table placed in front of it and occupying the centre of the floor-

space. A huge television set faces these objects and occupies the foreground. As the camera tracks back and cranes up to reveal the entirety of the space sprawling around Dane, the lenses converge on the coffee table in the middle of the room, so that Dane, standing in front of it, emerges slightly, and the TV in front of him in the foreground is placed far out onto the *platea*. Keeping the lenses converged on the table as the camera continues to crane up and back has the effect of stereoscopically bringing out foreground objects, uncannily accentuating the sense of the room sprawling out around him. Furthermore, his resultant emergence serves to give the sense that he is shrinking; as Higgins observes, "objects brought out of the screen suffer

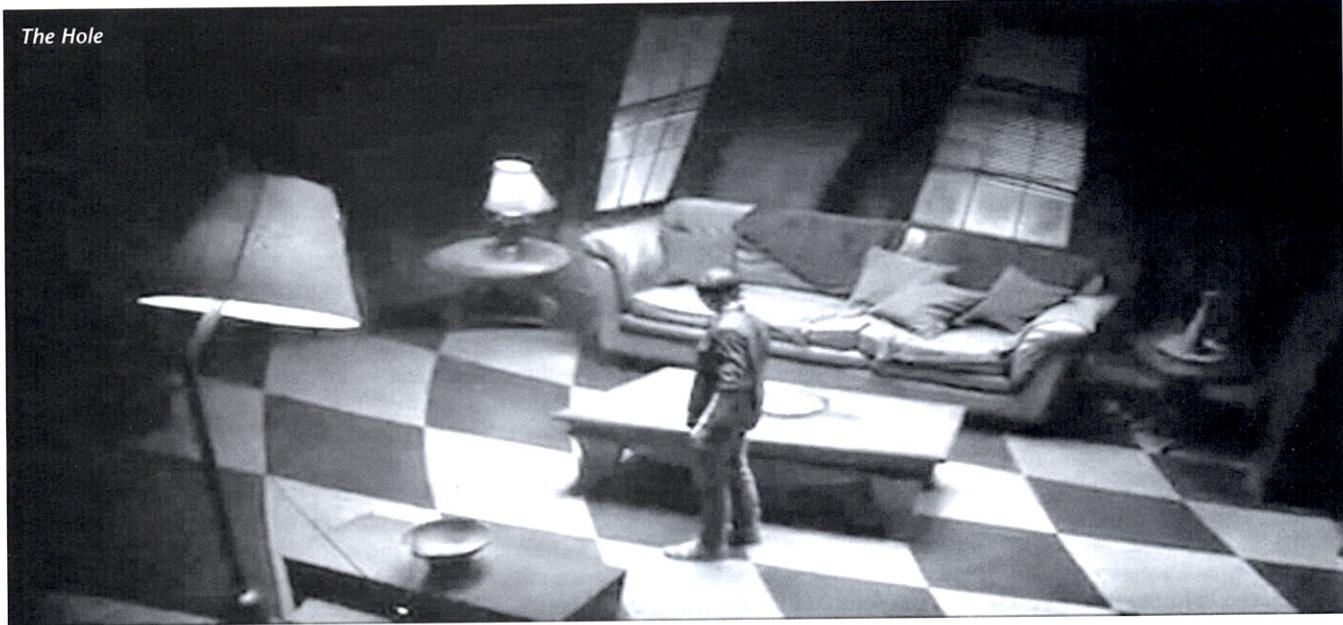
from a literal relationship of scale to the viewer's surroundings." Higgins cites the "phantom helicopters" from *Avatar* as victims of this: they "appear as models because they come within the viewer's grasp."¹⁶ Camera placement and stereographic positioning can often make objects seem smaller than they are, occasioning "hyperstereo". As Simon Reeve and Jason Flock explain, "by using a [distance between the camera lenses' axes] larger than the average human interocular of 2.5" the resulting images display objects that when viewed appear smaller than they are in reality": "Subjectively this makes the audience feel like a giant looking at tiny objects which is called 'miniaturization'."¹⁷ The extreme LOD of this shot, Dane's position on the *platea*, and his minuteness within the composition of the shot, all coalesce to create an almost palpable impression that he is much smaller than he is. Rather than detracting from narrative, hypostereo and emergence here heighten the sense of his vulnerability.

This manipulation of scale is instrumental in the sequence's second stage, where Dane asserts that he will protect his younger brother. As the two cower in the cupboard, Lucas says to Dane that they will be killed. Dane puts his arms on his younger brother's shoulders, and there is a cut to a close-up of Dane taken from over the shoulder of Lucas, the former in focus on the left and the latter out of focus on the right. Dane says, "Look at me. There's no way I'd let that happen, OK?" As he says "Look at me", the lenses converge on his face. His hands and Lucas's head on the right half of the frame – both out of focus – emerge. Once he starts to say "There's no way I'd let that happen", the lenses abruptly shift to a new point of convergence, back away from his face. This has the result of stereoscopically pushing his face further back into positive parallax. While the composition and focus of the shot remain the same, this shift occasions *hypostereo* – a move towards "giganticism" rather than miniaturisation¹⁸: moving convergence further away from Dane while refusing to move the camera creates a sense that he has somehow grown in size. This 'rack convergence', deployed at the moment when Dane finally acts towards his brother in a responsible and protective capacity, invisibly suggests that he will now be able to 'size up' against the negative model of adulthood that 'Mr. Thompson' represents.

Controlling the *Platea*

The final stage shows Dane facing off against the manifestation of his father, with the stereoscopic manipulation of scale used as a structuring element throughout the climactic battle. Throughout the sequence stereoscopy works alongside shot composition to give the impression that Dane is growing in size and mastering the extended diegesis (and that the inverse is happening to 'Mr. Thompson'). Negative parallax is instrumental to representing this shift in power.

It is worth noting here that while Dante maintains *The Hole* is "not a slasher movie" because "it's supposed to be something you can take your kids to"¹⁹, the film does evidence many formal strategies that are synonymous with that genre and are deployed in order to bespeak the protagonists' terror. In an early sequence, Lucas enters the basement for the first time, and the shots alternate between those aligned with Lucas and those that could possibly be attributed to the point-of-view of an unseen force occupying the *platea*. In *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, Carol Clover writes of the slasher film's "fluidity of engaged perspective"²⁰: for Clover, while "there are horror passages that would seem to position the spectator at least temporarily as an assaultive gazer,"²¹ aligning him or her with the killer, there are other sequences which inculcate "the sense not of mastery but of vulnerability."²² She terms this vulnerable mode of viewing "reactive gazing,"²³ and reads the spectator's experience of horror as a negotiation between these two modes: "what [the spectator is] experiencing as competing visual experiences should be animated as competing figures in the diegesis."²⁴ This is the case in *Halloween* (1978), where, as Steve Neale notes, "what is at issue, in a sense, is control of the frame"²⁵, and where, for Vera Dika, the Final Girl's victory over the killer is accomplished by robbing the latter of his "control of the visual field."²⁶ In *The Hole*, many earlier sequences are comprised of "assaultive" shots showing protagonists unaware of the threats lying beyond the screen, out on the *platea*. In such instances, *mise-en-scène* works in a similar, though stereoscopically accentuated way, to formal strategies apparent in Dika's reading of *Friday the 13th* suggesting the possibility that certain shots could represent the point of view of an antagonistic element:





The Hole



The Hole

"What may be initially perceived as an objective camera position [...] serves to conceal, or to not fully explain [events]. Moreover, certain conventionalised markers for a point-of-view shot are used, such as an unsteady or moving camera, or a shot taken from behind a partition, such as a bush or a doorway. But the exact position of a looker is not clearly established."²⁷

In *The Hole*, these markers are in negative parallax, insinuating fear's mastery of the *platea*. In the chosen sequence, Dane's fears have finally manifested themselves, and representational strategies suggest that the imposing giant 'Mr. Thompson' explicitly controls both the frame and the *platea*.

The sequence is composed of sets of medium shots and over-the-shoulder shots, each iteration altered subtly in composition so as to articulate the changing power relationship between the two: 'Mr. Thompson' begins as both larger than Dane and seemingly in control of negatively parallaxed space, though over the course of the shots Dane will eventually grow larger in size and come to reclaim the *platea*, ultimately suggesting that he has outgrown both his fear of 'Mr. Thompson' and this nightmare environment.

An early shot in this sequence is a medium shot of Dane and 'Mr. Thompson' standing opposite each other, in the middle of the living room floor. Dane stands to the left of the frame in the midground of the shot, his body in three-quarter profile, and 'Mr. Thompson' in the right foreground, the latter with his back to the frame. Medium shots with this composition recur throughout, each time with subtly different framing and stereoscopic blocking. This instance is in deep focus, converged on the coffee table behind them so that both characters emerge onto the *platea*. The top edge of the frame crops off the top of the

emergent antagonist's head, effecting a jarring "edge violation": this occurs when, as Reeve and Flock explain, "the action comes out of the screen [...] and the objects are cut off by the screen edges." Therefore "the image appears to be in front of the screen, yet is cut off by the screen frame, so it simultaneously appears to be behind the screen [causing] a 'conflict of cues'.²⁹ For Noël Burch—who maintained that "cinematic space" in monoscopic cinema consists of "two different kinds of space: that included within the frame and that outside the frame"³⁰—when "much of the person's body remains off screen", the off-screen space is more emphatically present than if his entire body had suddenly appeared in frame.³¹ Edge violation accentuates this emphasis, insinuating that 'Mr. Thompson' masters the *platea*. Concomitantly, Dane's compositional minuteness in the midground of the shot coupled with his emergence serves to miniaturise him, this time in proportion to the gigantic 'Mr. Thompson', suggesting that Dane's fears are very much in control. In this shot the frightened Dane attacks 'Mr. Thompson' with a plate lying on the coffee table behind them, which the latter brushes aside. This associates violence with being "afraid", implicitly insinuating the weakness at the heart of Dane's father's violence.

Though the actor Chris Massoglia's staggered line delivery and widened eyes suggest otherwise, Dane tells 'Mr. Thompson' that he is not afraid of him. There follows the first of a series of over-the-shoulder shots, whose gradated stereoscopic shifts will come to suggest the shifting power relationship between them. This one is taken in deep focus and converges on 'Mr. Thompson', who occupies the right third of the frame, and is taken from over Dane's emergent shoulder. Here, 'Mr. Thompson' replies that, "You wouldn't be here if that was true." After saying this, he steps forward towards Dane and the cam-

era. The IoD is promptly shortened so that Dane retains the same amount of negative parallax, occupying a consistent position on the *platea*, while the lenses stay converged on Mr. 'Thompson' as he approaches. Keeping 'Mr. Thompson' stereoscopically level with the screen plane guides the eyes to follow him, emphasising this overbearing movement towards both Dane and the spectator. He growls, "You've been afraid your whole life."

Aware of his opponent's mental origin, Dane steadfastly replies that he is not frightened anymore, "Because you can't hurt me". The shot that follows is another medium shot of the two with the coffee table and sofa in the background, showing 'Mr Thompson' on the right hand side of the frame stumbling back slightly and reeling from this acknowledgement. The stereoscopy of the sequence is different from the last time, however: lenses now converge on Dane rather than the table behind them. Resultantly, this time it is only 'Mr. Thompson' – closer to the camera in the foreground—who occupies the *platea*. Though 'Mr. Thompson' still masters the *platea* through edge violation, Dane is no longer brought out onto the *platea* to suffer from such extreme hyperstereo. He seems to be gaining some measure of control.

Another over-the-shoulder shot of 'Mr. Thompson' follows, and implies that Dane has begun to confront and master his fears. Occupying the right third of the frame and in three-quarter profile, 'Mr. Thompson' moves back away from Dane and into the *locus*. Dane emerges just as much as before. Lenses remain converged on 'Mr. Thompson' as he steps away, an inversion of the previous shot where they converged on him as he approached, convergence now emphasising his retreat rather than his approach. Harsher lighting shows more of 'Mr. Thompson's' face as he begins to resemble a man of flesh and blood rather than a nightmarish monster. In response to this loss of control, he lashes out, swinging his belt buckle at Dane's face. Once again violence is associated with weakness, but this time it is explicitly attributed to the father rather than to the son.

The attribution of 'Mr. Thompson's' violence to weakness is further emphasised when 'Mr. Thompson' throws a temper tantrum and chases Dane around the living room in a quickly cut sequence that makes stereoscopy difficult to discern because, as editor Walter Murch notes; "it takes a number of milliseconds for the brain/eye to 'get' what the space of each shot is and adjust."³² The few that last long enough for stereoscopic depth grading to be apparent are telling, however. In another iteration of the medium shot, Dane in the far background hides behind the sofa, which occupies the midground of the shot, while 'Mr. Thompson' is positioned in the foreground, to the right of the coffee table, also in the foreground and placed centrally in the frame. The camera tracks in and Mr. Thompson lifts the coffee table up off of its legs in a petulant rage. Lenses converge on the sofa in the midground, bringing both 'Mr. Thompson' and the coffee table out onto the *platea*. 'Mr. Thompson' resultantly "suffers" greatly due to his "literal relationship" to his surroundings: the coffee table he lifts, also out of the *platea*, is manifestly larger than he is. Having the environment dwarf 'Mr. Thompson' also reaffirms that his violence arises from overwhelming fear.

In a following close-up two-shot both characters face each other in profile at opposite sides of the frame. The shot's composition equalises them as does convergence: both emerge, intensifying the representation of their facial gestures that betray resolve and fear respectively. Spot lighting throws 'Mr.

Thompson's' frightened face into the highest relief yet: the whites of his eyes are now visible. Earlier examples have shown the protagonists' in tight close-up at their most vulnerable moments, lenses converged on their eyes and a long IoD bringing facial features out onto the *platea*. As Miriam Ross observes, "stereoscopic configuration of space [...] has the ability to re-make the close-up" because the technology "enhances the multiple and simultaneously minute movements in [characters'] features": "the detailed exploration of the face is enhanced by the hyper-real quality that stereoscopic images produce."³³ Higgins too states that emergence in close-ups "can accentuate expression."³⁴ Through this closer shot, 'Mr. Thompson' is shown to be equally as prone to fear as the other characters have been throughout the film. Dane asks, "You were scared of everybody else, weren't you?" While slightly emergent, 'Mr. Thompson' fearfully looks out towards the audience space in dread: this manifestation of fear no longer masters the expanse of *platea*, as it did at the beginning of the film when it menaced Lucas.

These words take a stronger toll on 'Mr. Thompson' than anything else Dane has said up until this point. He stumbles back away from his son again. This occasions the cut to the final over-the-shoulder shot, representing Dane's ultimate victory over his fears. This iteration sets the camera further away from Dane: both characters' upper torsos are now visible. This over-the-shoulder medium shot of 'Mr. Thompson' functions as a culmination and synthesis of the two types of shot repeated throughout the sequence thus far. Dane stands with his back to the spectator. Whereas previous over-the-shoulder and medium shots have placed Dane on the left and 'Mr. Thompson' on the right, here Dane occupies the right hand side of the frame, standing in the foreground with his back to the camera, while the dazed 'Mr. Thompson', in three-quarter profile, steps into the background of the left side. Brighter lighting reveals even more of his terrified face. Lenses now converge on a point just in front of Dane's chest, bringing him further out onto the *platea* and causing 'Mr. Thompson' to recede far away into the far depths of the *locus* as he stumbles back. There is a slow track in within this shot that brings Dane further out onto the *platea*, eventually cropping off the top of his head. This results in slight edge violation, with Dane larger now than the frame can fit. The image functions as an inverted version of the earlier stand-off between the two where 'Mr. Thompson', who was in control at that point, emerged and violated the frame's edges. Whereas the offscreen space in the film has up until now been controlled by the characters' fears, it has now been mastered by Dane, who has both realised and avoided his father's weakness. Dane is now in "control of the visual field"³⁵, spilling out over the boundaries of the frame, mastering the *platea*. Whereas at the outset of the film threats lurked and menaced characters from an invisible place out on the *platea*, now the weakened 'Mr. Thompson' is flung back far into the *locus*, wholly visible and vulnerable. In some ways, Dane's wresting of the *platea* away from the malevolent force seems like a stereoscopic renegotiation of the slasher film's shift from an "identification" with the antagonist's point-of-view to that of the protagonist, as read by Clover: throughout those films, this "shift" is "underwritten by storyline as well as camera position" so that by the end of the film, the point of view is aligned with the protagonist: "with her, we become if not the killer of the killer then the agent of his expulsion from the narrative vision."³⁶ Just as in *The Hole*, the antagonist's pretense of holding the film's gaze is revealed to hold "the status of a fiction straining to be a fact," with "its postur-

ings [exposed] for what they are.”³⁷

In a last-ditch attempt to reassert control of the extended diegesis, ‘Mr. Thompson’ attempts to swing the belt out at his son. Before it can emerge out onto the *platea* (his body still faces the camera in three-quarter profile), there is a cut to a close-up of Dane’s hand catching it. In this close-up, the taught belt horizontally bisects the shot and Dane’s clenched fist, holding it, occupies the right-hand side of the frame. Extreme IoD works in conjunction with the scene’s shallow focus (obfuscating any onscreen information aside from the object and the hand that grabs it) to bring both fist and belt buckle far out onto the *platea*. This serves to ‘stereodetermine’ Dane’s mastery over the violence which is the cause of his fears.

One of the final shots in the sequence shows how far Dane has progressed by way of stereoscopically inverting an earlier shot. He and ‘Mr. Thompson’ stand alone on the living room floor as the décor falls away into a void of positive parallax. Dane’s fears, as ‘Mr. Thompson’ observes, “are falling away”. The camera cranes around the small piece of remaining floor in an extremely long aerial shot that keeps the two of them central as it both moves from left to right and cranes up away from them. Lenses converge on Mr. Thompson throughout, placing Dane in positive parallax. Once the camera has come to a rest in an extreme long shot, its convergence and composition are remarkably similar to the first establishing shot of the living room, where Dane was dwarfed by this nightmare memory space and brought far out onto the *platea*. Now, however, lenses converge near Dane, who is placed in the background of the shot: he occupies a position in stereospace roughly congruent that occupied by the coffee table in the opening establishing shot. The extreme IoD this time ensures that it is ‘Mr. Thompson’, standing in front of Dane and closer to the spectator, who emerges far out onto the *platea*. Convergence works with ‘Mr. Thompson’s’ size relative to the borders of the frame to miniaturise him in an example of emergent hyperstereo very similar to the sequence’s establishing miniaturisation of Dane. The situation has been reversed: Dane has mastered his fear and it is now Mr. Thompson who resembles the model helicopters of *Avatar*, small and vanquished.

Dane begins to swing the buckle in the air around him like nunchaku. ‘Mr. Thompson’ sneers at Dane in a following shot and growls: “like father, like son.” Refusing to use the overdetermined object towards violent ends and live up to this chide, Dane uses it instead to lasso the ceiling fan hanging above the two of them and make his escape. Standing atop the ceiling fan, he looks down to ‘Mr. Thompson’, who is struggling to keep hold of the last piece of flooring which exists in this strange void space. Dane says, “I am nothing like you”, and climbs up a cable connecting the fan to the hole’s exit. ‘Mr. Thompson’—whose hair has fallen back to reveal a frightened, human face—loses purchase and falls into the positively parallaxed depths of the hole. Dane’s fears are forced back far into the *locus*, never to master the extended diegesis again.³⁸

Moving away from polarised conceptions of distraction and involvement, this demonstrates that stereoscopy can be deployed—or at least read—in a manner that contributes to meaning construction. While the film’s fantastical conceit and nature as a children’s film may lend it a certain “aesthetic roominess”, *The Hole* remains an example of an expressive text that deploys stereoscopy to reinforce and accentuate its character-based narrative, pointing towards a “sustainable aesthetic” that needn’t shy away from emergence.

Notes

- 1 William Paul, “The Aesthetics of Emergence”, in *Film History*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (September, 1993), 335
- 2 Scott Higgins, “3D in Depth: *Coraline*, *Hugo*, and a Sustainable Aesthetic”, in *Film History*, Vol. 24 No.2 (2012), 198
- 3 Paul, 322
- 4 Higgins, 199
- 5 Ibid., 200
- 6 Ibid., 203
- 7 Ibid., 201
- 8 Interview with Joe Dante, from “Interviews with the Cast & Crew”, on the DVD of *The Hole* (Joe Dante, Bold Films, U.S., 2009)
- 9 Higgins, 200
- 10 William Paul, “Breaking the Fourth Wall: ‘Belascosim’, Modernism, and a 3-D Kiss Me Kate”, in *Film History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2004), 237
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ryan Lambie, “Joe Dante interview: *The Hole*, *Gremlins 3* and marketing *Innerspace*”, Accessed 6th September 2012, <www.denofgeek.com/movies/16352/joe-dante-interview-the-hole-gremlins-3-and-marketing-innerspace>
- 13 Higgins, 202
- 14 Tamao Nakahara, “Making Up Monsters: Set and Costume Design in Horror Films”, in ed. Ian Conrich, *Horror Zone* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 139-40, quoting Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama”, in Marcia Landy, ed., *Imitations of Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 79
- 15 Sheldon Hall, “Dial M For Murder”, in *Film History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2004), pp. 243-255, 252
- 16 Higgins, 200
- 17 Simon Reeve & Jason Flock, “Basic Principles of Stereoscopic 3D”, Accessed September 6th, 2012, <www.sky.com/shop/export/sites/www.sky.com/shop/_PDF/3D/Basic_Principles_of_Stereoscopic_3D_v1.pdf>
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 James Mottram, “Joe Dante: Serious Mischief”, in *Sight & Sound*, Volume 20 No. 10 (October 2012), 25
- 20 Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 46
- 21 Ibid., 211
- 22 Ibid., 187
- 23 Ibid., 191
- 24 Ibid., 209
- 25 Steve Neale, “Halloween: Suspense, Aggression, and the Look” in eds. Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett, *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, Revised Edition (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 365
- 26 Vera Dika, *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), 49
- 27 Ibid., 67
- 28 Hall, 246
- 29 Reeve & Flock, <www.sky.com/shop/export/sites/www.sky.com/shop/_PDF/3D/Basic_Principles_of_Stereoscopic_3D_v1.pdf>
- 30 Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 17
- 31 Ibid., 21
- 32 Walter Murch, in Roger Ebert, “Why 3D Doesn’t Work and Never Will”, accessed March 15th, 2011<blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2011/01/post_4.html>
- 33 Miriam Ross, “Spectacular Dimensions: 3D Dance Films”, in *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 61 (December 2011), accessed September 6th, 2012 <sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/spectacular-dimensions-3d-dance-films/>
- 34 Higgins, 207
- 35 Dika, 49
- 36 Clover, 45
- 37 Ibid., 304
- 38 For Dika “the interaction between the heroine and the killer” in the eighties’ stalker film and “the viewer’s shifting identification” between them could be seen to be related to “the opposition ego/id”, a reading which could also apply to the relationship between Dane and ‘Mr. Thompson’. Dika admonishes against such schematisation, however, maintaining that “these terms should be understood as describing a dynamic between the opposing sides to a single internal force, one that struggles between the poles of conscious restraint and unbridled violent action.” (58)

"Then one day I got in."

COMPUTER IMAGING, REALISM,



By JUSTIN MORRIS

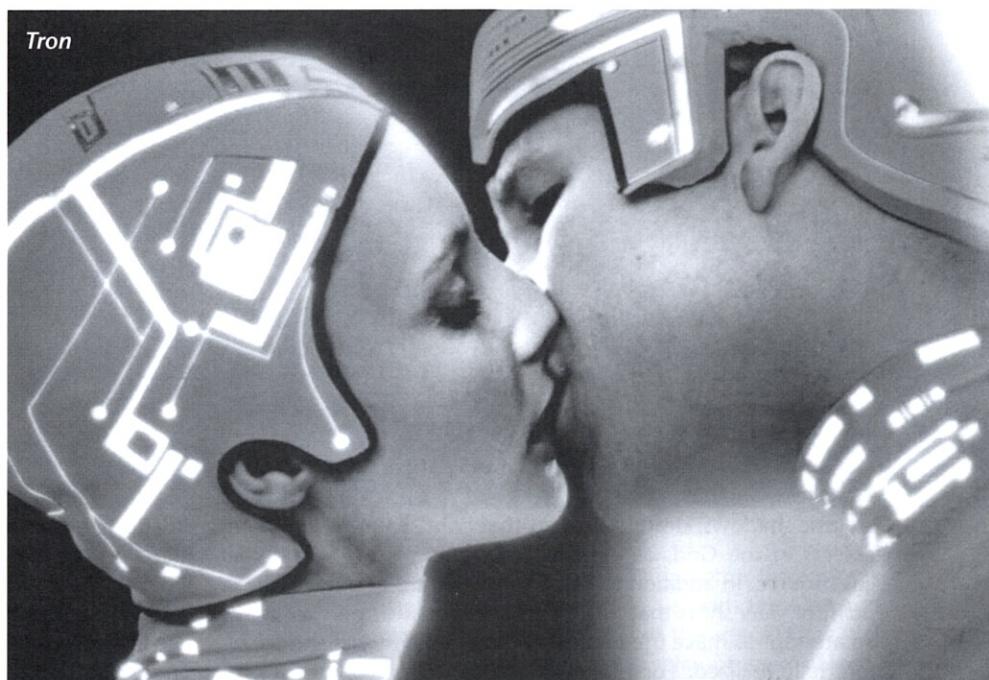
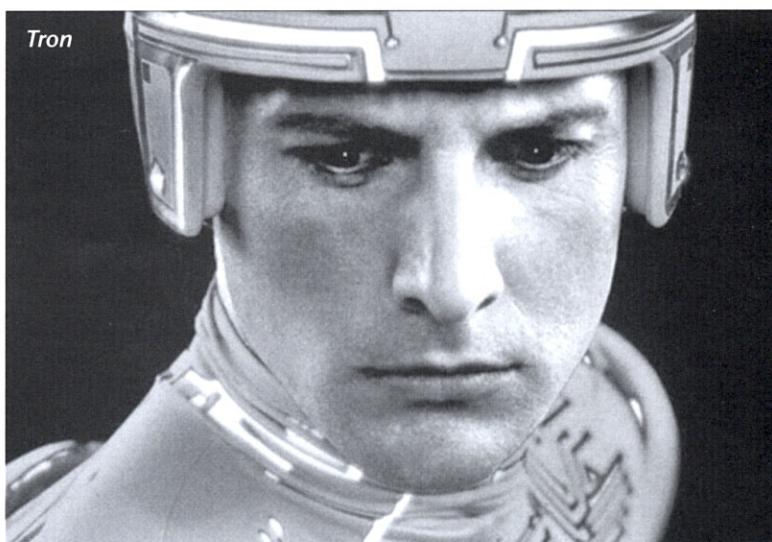
Director Steven Lisberger's groundbreaking effects film *Tron* (1982) concludes with a single static shot (captured from the roof of a skyscraper) of an anonymous city as it moves from light to darkness. As the grey cityscape transforms into a bustling neon glow and ultimately fades to black, the image's prescient metaphor becomes clear: the "real-world" nighttime city closely resembles the film's computer world (the Grid), suggesting that *Tron* is merely a step towards an inevitable future in which the audience's second life inside of the machine will become increasingly normalized. *Tron*'s delayed sequel *Tron Legacy* (directed by Joseph Kosinski, released some 28 years later) mirrors *Tron*'s fitting coda in its commencement—abstract lines over a basic "grid" slowly transform into a city street as Kevin Flynn (in voiceover) explains his conception of the Grid. If the finale of *Tron* is to suggest a hopeful utopian future enabled by computers, the opening of *Tron Legacy* seems to announce the arrival of that future. Though the likening of the corporeal body of the city to the abstract network of the machine interface seems appropriate for two films that often conflate reality and fantasy on the level of narrative, the changing attitudes between the coda of *Tron* and the prologue of its sequel are perhaps representative of a shift in *Tron*'s means of presenting the inside world of the computer across the 28 years between their respective releases. The ultimate question posed by *Tron* and *Tron Legacy* is one of technology and realism, and how traditional cinematic codes thought to demarcate notions of "reality" have been adapted to the growing field of computer graphics, despite their inherent ability to represent anything conceivable to the human imagination.

In Chapter 4 of his monumental study of "new media", Lev Manovich takes up the question of realism in computer generated imaging, noting that after the 20th century art world's rejection of the pursuit of illusionism:

The production of illusionistic representations has become the domain of mass culture and of media technologies—photography, film, and video [...] Today, everywhere, these machines are being replaced by new digital illusion generators—computers [...] this massive replacement is one of the key economic factors that keeps the new media industries expanding. As a consequence these industries are obsessed with visual illusionism.¹

This “obsession” with visual illusionism, defined by the perceived ability of a computer generated image to faithfully “recreate” reality, mirrors similar concerns for illusionism in the visual arts at large, concerns that are reduced by Manovich into 3 primary arguments: the image’s representations must share some features with the physical reality it recreates; the image should be presented in a manner that reflects natural human vision; each new image should contain an element of realistic representation that is superior to the last: “for instance, the evolution of cinema from silent to sound to color”.² Manovich takes up these arguments and, using the film theories of four primary scholars of cinematic realism—Andre Bazin, Jean-Louis Comolli, David Bordwell and Janet Staiger—effectively asserts that the history of realism in computer-generated imagery (CGI)—from its development in the late 1970s to its renaissance in the early 1990s—echoes similar developments in the history of cinema from its emergence in 1895 to the present era of digital cinema. By addressing each of these theorists in turn, and examining Manovich’s application of their theories to the medium of CGI, one is able to discover in *Tron* and *Tron Legacy* the fulfillment of Manovich’s argument that “the history of technological innovation and research is presented as a progression towards realism—the ability to simulate any object in such a way that its computer image is indistinguishable from a photograph”³ And yet while this teleological progress narrative of finding realism in computer representations can be discovered in the movement from *Tron* to *Tron Legacy*, the latter film’s increased library of codes of cinematic realism marks a regression in the utopian potential of *Tron*’s visual style. As Manovich asks (with no small degree of certainty as to the answer): “can we expect that cinematographic images [...] will at some point be replaced by very different images whose appearance will be more in tune with their underlying computer-based logic?”.⁴ It becomes clear that while *Tron* functions to suggest a revolutionary untried visual aesthetic (perhaps even demonstrative of an “underlying computer-based logic”) its sequel works to nullify this visual revolution and return the Grid firmly to the realms of traditional cinematic representation.

Introducing Bazinian notions of realism, Manovich emphasizes that, for Bazin, “realism stands for the approximation of phenomenological qualities of reality, ‘the reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief’ [...] and] that a realistic representation should also approximate the perceptual and cognitive dynamics of natural vision”.⁵ Indeed, discussing the films of William Wyler, Jean Renoir, and Orson Welles, Bazin argues: “depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality [...] it implies, consequently, [...] a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator”.⁶ Manovich relates this Bazinian notion of cinematic reality to computer imagery by suggesting that “in interactive computer graphics, [...] the user can freely explore the virtual space of the display from different points of view”, suggesting that the ability to “navigate



space” in the new computer image allows for the same type of freedom afforded by deep focus cinematography.⁷ Though *Tron* presents a traditional cinematic viewing experience, devoid of any real computer interactivity (though the concept of user activity forms the primary plot thrust of the film), many of *Tron*’s computer-generated images nonetheless underscore Manovich’s assertion that “the new media image is something the user actively goes into, zooming in or clicking”.⁸ Zapped by a giant laser, Kevin Flynn’s entrance into the world of the Grid, an elaborate point of view computer-camera tracking shot that takes the viewer down the proverbial rabbit hole (Fred Glass recognizes that, in the world of *Tron*, “allusions to L. Frank Baum and Lewis Carroll abound”⁹) is suggestive of this conception of the “new media image”. By establishing the Grid through a continuous shot that implies not only Flynn’s, but the viewer’s entrance into the computer, *Tron* grants a sense of agency to the viewer that is not unlike that afforded by deep-focus cinematography. Fred Glass, discussing the computer as

character in a number of films of the 1980s, recognizes this invitation to audience interaction in his description of the sequence: "we break free into a series of computer-generated planes, which set abstract geometric constructions revolving around one another, dissolving through one plane to the next" (italics mine).¹⁰ In addition to *Tron*'s adoption of Bazin's understanding of viewer agency vis-à-vis deep-focus realism into a new media paradigm, the evolution of computer based graphics between the release of *Tron* and *Tron Legacy* points to a kind of teleological narrative of technological progress embedded in Bazin's theory.

Adapting Bazin's teleology to the development of CGI, Manovich endorses a comparative approach to suggest that the history of computer graphics can be read as a natural progression towards increased realism. Manovich observes that to "follow Bazin's approach and compare images drawn from the history of 3-D computer graphics with the visual perception of natural reality, his evolutionary narrative appears to be confirmed [...] during the 1970s and the 1980s, computer images progressed towards a fuller and fuller illusion of reality—from wireframe displays to smooth shadows, detailed textures, and aerial perspective".¹¹ This description of the "illusion of reality" in the computer images of the 70s and 80s finds a potent example in *Tron*. Observing *Tron*'s first elaborate chase sequence in which the characters of Flynn, Tron, and Ram are pursued throughout the Grid on light-cycles, one is able to identify each of Manovich's markers of realism in 70s and 80s CGI. Designed to resemble a computer mainframe, the long lines of the literal grid that the light-cycles traverse serves to diegetically and non-diegetically represent early computer technology: the literal "grid" makes up the computer landscape of the film, while being a marker of a pioneering technique in computer imaging. As Flynn and co. race around the Grid (the actors' human bodies situated in the computer space not by CG manipulation, but clever editing), we are often given quick and overly-smooth camera movements that track from an aerial perspective into the dark, sleek space in which objects cast realistic shadows, despite the fact that light seems to emit from objects in the Grid, as opposed to coming from an external light source. In addition to these shots, we are frequently given point of view shots that further emphasize linear perspective in an attempt to make the space feel three dimensional and therefore fully realized. For Manovich, these are markers of a progression in computer images from those of the 1960s and early 70s, during which time "computer imaging was mostly abstract because it was algorithm-driven".¹² Comparing this sequence from *Tron* to its equivalent in *Tron Legacy*, one is able to further follow the progression of digital images from the 1980s to the early 21st century.

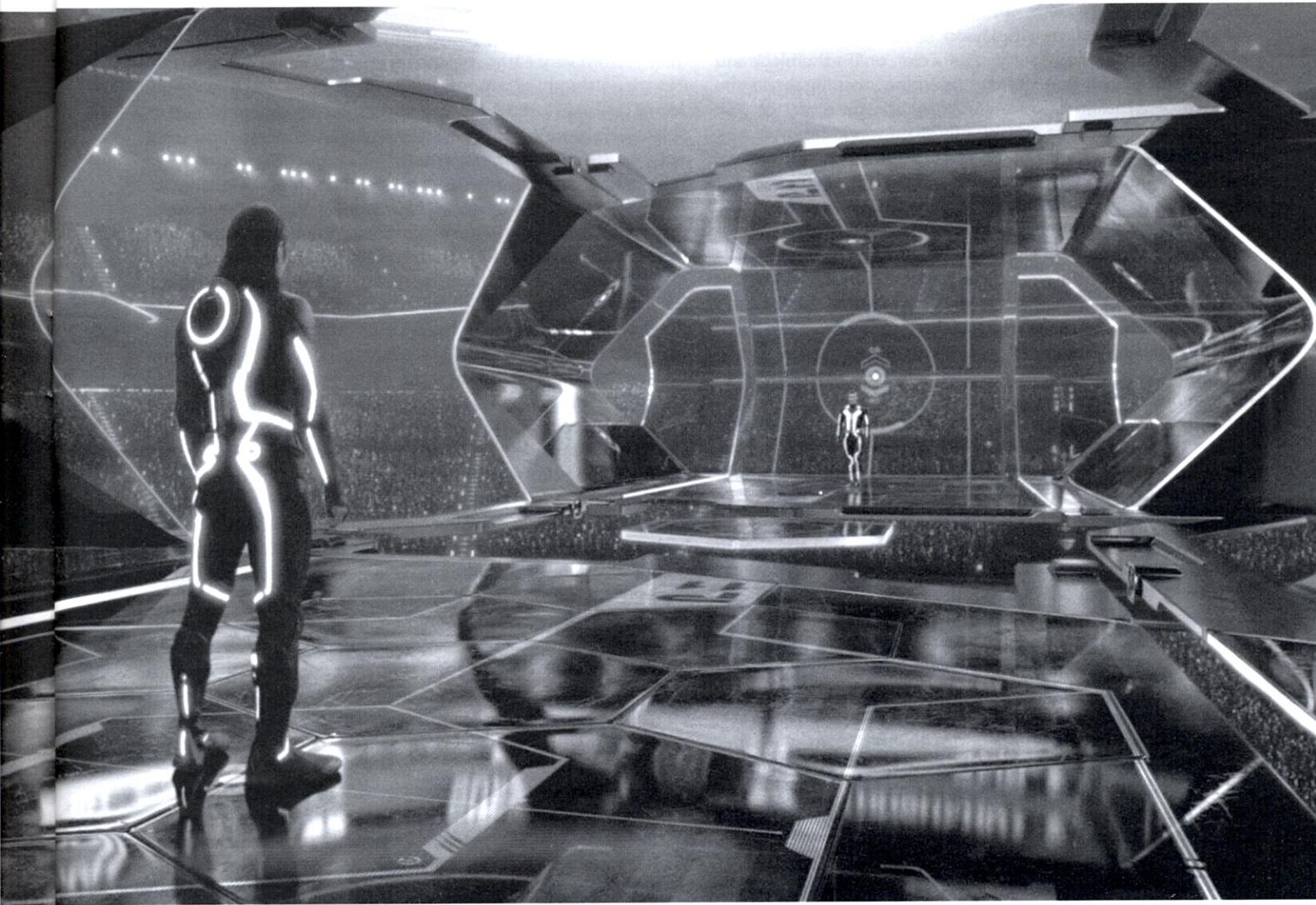
If, in the CGI of the early 1980s, one can identify distinct markers of cinematic realism at work: wireframe displays, aerial perspective, and shadow, observing the computer effects of the early 2010s adds a number of representative codes to this list. Having been rescued by "isomorphic algorithm" Quorra from a light-cycle battle, Sam Flynn travels "off-Grid" into a mountainous area to meet his father. Gone are the wireframe environs and overly robotic camera movements, replaced with rocky terrain and smoother pans and tracking shots. Removed from the pristine sleek exteriors of the Grid, this off-Grid environment is virtually indistinguishable from a real-world mountain range, complete with dust and, interestingly, weather (in the form of a seemingly constant lightning storm). While the "reality effect"

of *Tron* was essentially dependent on the illusion of a multi-dimensional space, *Tron Legacy* ties into Manovich's contention that "rather than utilizing the single dimension of visual fidelity; they [the computer programmers] construct the reality effect on a number of dimensions", including "the accuracy of the simulation of physical objects, [and] natural phenomena".¹³ Though the rugged "off-Grid" environment of *Tron Legacy* seems counter to the computer world established in *Tron*, it functions to display the capabilities of the rendering technology to present various elements of a real-world experience. The progression traced here can be read as a movement, from a computer based image concerned with representing objects in space through perspective, to one that has transcended these primary concerns to become obsessed with presenting each individual aspect of real-world perception in an effort to achieve a "total" computer-generated image. This vertical movement within CGI technology can be likened to a similar progression in the history of cinema as outlined as Bazin, who notes that "if the origins of an art reveal something of its nature, then one may legitimately consider the silent and sound film as stages of a technical development that little by little made a reality out of the original 'myth'" where the perhaps crude images of *Tron* are read as simply a stage on the road to fuller competency in achieving the "reality effect" in *Tron Legacy*.¹⁴ Though this Bazinian understanding of progress is certainly apparent in the comparison of these two films, the addition and subtraction of codes that constitute the "reality effect" in these films suggests a different understanding of cinematic realism altogether.

Reading the history of cinematic style as non-teleological, Jean-Louis Comolli is "against Bazin's 'idealist' and evolutionary account" as he "proposes a 'materialist' and fundamentally nonlinear reading of the history of cinematic technology and style".¹⁵ Manovich acknowledges that, for Comolli, the cinema is a social medium that "works endlessly to reduplicate the visible, thus sustaining the illusion that it is the phenomenal forms that constitute the social 'real' [...] cinema must maintain and constantly update its 'realism'".¹⁶ Indeed, Comolli emphasizes that cinematic realism is not a process of recreating reality on the screen, but rather consistently acknowledging the limited perception that human vision allows: "the human eye loses its immemorial privilege; the mechanical eye of the photographic machine now sees *in its place*, and in certain aspects with more sureness".¹⁷ Because the mechanical eye is not bound to recreating reality, as it is perceived with the human eye—which is undeniably subjective and flawed—cinematic style need only to point towards markers of reality to be identified as such.

Tron Legacy





Spectators are placed in a position of "disavowal" and "each new technological development (sounds, panchromatic stock, color) points out to viewers just how 'unrealistic' the previous image was".¹⁸ Images captured on film are therefore not an archive of a reality, but rather a "negative index, the restriction the disavowal of which is the symptom and which it tries to fill while at the same time displaying it".¹⁹ The changing value of various codes of realism allows the audience to disavow the previous image, which is now understood as "unrealistic", while also disavowing that the present image must therefore be as well. Comolli notes this transition in early cinema by marking the loss of deep focus (which was, as we have seen, an early indicator of realism) and its replacement with more enhanced shading and the development of sound technology. Similarly, Manovich demonstrates that early 3-D computer animation, of which *Tron* is an example, was primarily concerned with "the indication of an object's volume".²⁰

Viewing a early scene in *Tron*, in which Flynn's avatar CLU is pursued in his tank by large O-shaped crafts known as "recognizers" across the Grid, one can easily identify the use of deep space, with the Grid moving back into the shot for an indeterminate distance before disappearing into blackness. The depiction of the Grid in this manner does not use the deep focus

effect (in which objects in the distance become increasingly blurry) but is instead presented in full focus, with the Grid and its vehicles visible until the abrupt end of the space. Here it is evident that what is important is the display of each object's volume, of their place situated in space. This technique allows the historical viewer to disavow the elements of *Tron* that are decidedly unlike reality—the sharp rendering of vehicles, grayscale characters that are placed into what seems to be a hand-colored environment, etc. When comparing these shots of perfect deep space in *Tron* with those of *Tron Legacy*, one can begin to identify the former as perhaps being an epitomization of Manovich's question of a computer cinema firmly rooted not in traditional cinematic techniques, but in an inherent "computer based logic", a question that will be further explored later on. *Tron Legacy's* introduction to the Grid, shown in vast aerial shots as the camera follows a recognizer on which Sam Flynn is a prisoner, allows the audience to take part in this disavowal of the unrealities of the original *Tron*. As the camera follows the recognizer up into the skyline of the Grid (now embodied as a fully rendered city), we are given the depiction of deep space, but now the deep-focus effect is in full employment as objects further in the distance are shown as blurry and obscured by mist and weather. Though the "programs" that Sam Flynn

meets are designed to look sleek and pale (one program is even missing part of his face, displaying his binary insides underneath), they are very obviously in full color, unlike the black and white characters of *Tron*. Finally, returning once again to the presence of weather, the straight black computer sky of *Tron* has been replaced with a consistently stormy, and far more textured firmament. These changing codes are characteristic of Comolli's understanding of the "addition and substitution" of cinematic codes to allow for the "state of disavowal" needed to recognize realism in *Tron Legacy* in opposition to that of *Tron*.²¹ The disavowal between the codes of realism in *Tron* and its sequel seems to be an element that was recognized even by the studio that released the films, Disney, who withheld releasing *Tron* on DVD until the sequel had been released, with some suggesting that Disney was "afraid [the] now-hokey special effects [of *Tron* would] alienate the sequel's most important demographic: teens".²² The idea that Comolli's notion of addition and substitution in the creation of cinematic codes of realism can be linked to the economic structure of the film industry signals another interpretation of cinematic realism, one intimately linked to industry.

Linking the development of codes of realism to the economic drive of film producers, Manovich recognizes that the theory of David Bordwell and Janet Staiger asserts that for "production companies, the constant substitution of codes is necessary to stay competitive [...] as in every industry, the producers of computer animation stay competitive by differentiating their products".²³ The process of promoting the novelty of technological cinematic development in an effort to sell tickets is a project that is, for Bordwell and Staiger, one of the fundamental concerns of Hollywood film production. The authors maintain that "Hollywood has promoted mechanical marvels as assiduously as it has publicized stars, properties, and genres [...] sound, color, widescreen, 3-D [...] and other novelties were marketing strategies as much as they were technological innovations [...] today, [...] *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *Tron*, et al. continue the cult of special effects".²⁴ In the push for production companies to stay current, "old techniques disappear [...] new algorithms to produce new effects are constantly developed [...] to stay competitive, a company has to incorporate quickly the new software into their offerings".²⁵ Analyzing the release contexts of *Tron* and its sequel, one can identify some interconnections with Bordwell and Staiger's theory.

Ironically, the status of *Tron* as a pioneer in computer graphics would suggest that it is outside of this system of economic innovation, but that it is part of a body of films that created the economic drive for computer animation houses to consistently improve their product. *Tron*'s narrative is decidedly anti-corporation, "detailing the problems generated by large corporations for the people they employ: deadly competition among executives; dehumanization of workers; encouragement of immoral acts for profit", as Flynn enters into the computer in an attempt to find proof that former employer ENCOM stole the designs for their best selling games from him.²⁶ *Tron*'s narrative concerns and pioneering status places it at the beginning of chain of films defined by the economic model posed by Bordwell and Staiger, and, as a result, the originality of *Tron*'s computer animations in the context of 1982 render those of *Tron Legacy* common-place and largely derivative in the Hollywood of 2010. Of particular note is *Tron Legacy*'s status as a 3-D film, a technique that has become increasingly popular following the release of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). Though it has been

noted by William Paul that "stereoscopy is almost as old as photography, and 3-D cinematography has been available to filmmakers from very early on", the technology has only been used in various stages as a money making scheme (such as in the 1950s and the 1980s) when Hollywood feared a reduction in ticket sales brought on by the introduction of competing technologies (television, the internet).²⁷ Though *Tron* was released well within the timeframe of the development of 3-D technology (interestingly, Paul notes 1982 as a representative year for the 1980s 3-D boom) its revolutionary computer animations served as novelty enough, while *Tron Legacy*'s release into a market dominated by computer generated films required Disney to produce it in 3-D to "stay competitive".²⁸ If one is to describe the immersive experience of 3-D films as an extravagant extrapolation of both the effect of deep-focus photography, as defined by Bazin, and the inherent immersion defining the new media image, as suggested by Manovich, *Tron Legacy*'s use of 3-D technology reveals a further concern with realism, albeit one that is defined by monetary gain. John Belton contends that the proposed innovation of digital cinema is in fact a "false revolution", beginning "in the realm of special effects-a field that is now dominated by computer-generated imagery [...] the digital revolution is more clearly being driven by [...] corporate interests in marketing, that it is by a desire [...] to revolutionize the *theatrical* movie going experience".²⁹ Therefore, though we can read the evolution of *Tron Legacy*'s style over its predecessor as a teleological development of computer technologies, or as an interplay of varying codes that suggests a comparative realism to the audience, it also becomes clear that the producers of *Tron Legacy* needed to present the film in a style congruent with the latest in digital technology in an effort to "stay competitive".

In addition to the aforementioned developments between the release of *Tron* and *Tron Legacy*, one can find in the latter a concern with "the ultimate goal of computer animation": the realistic recreation of the human form.³⁰ As Manovich elaborates: "a lot of research activity has been dedicated to the development of moving humanoid figures and synthetic actors [...] yet] the task of creating fully synthetic actors has turned out to be more complex than was originally anticipated".³¹ In *Tron Legacy*, the figure of CLU (Kevin Flynn's computer avatar and totalitarian ruler of the Grid) is a computer rendered character that is an attempt to physically represent Jeff Bridges as he was 30 years prior in the original *Tron*. Scenes including the character, particularly those in which he is interacting with Kevin Flynn (played by the aged Jeff Bridges, in the flesh) are at once impressive and disturbing in their uncanny presentation. It could be argued that CLU is an example of Manovich's controversial proposition that "we should not consider clean, skinless, too flexible, and at the same time too jerky, human figures in 3-D computer animation as unrealistic, as imperfect approximations to the real thing [...] they are perfectly realistic representations of a cyborg body yet to come".³² Though the fantasy space of the Grid implies a cyborg future where the somewhat disturbing mannerisms of the computer-rendered Bridges seem commonplace, *Tron Legacy*'s use of this computer based figure suggests a more complex reading.

Within the narrative context of the film, CLU wishes to escape from the Grid and lead a digital army that could take over the world outside the Grid's computer confinement. However, in a manner of speaking, CLU has already escaped the Grid. *Tron Legacy* opens with a flash back to 1989 in which a

young Sam Flynn is told the story of the original *Tron* by his father, Kevin. The scene mostly serves to catch the audience up on the plot points of the previous film and for the majority of the scene Flynn's face is obscured, suggesting traditional techniques of hiding an actor's age in flashbacks. However, as the scene draws to a close and Flynn turns to leave we are given a medium shot of Flynn's head and torso, revealing that he is computer generated. The film then moves into a sequence detailing the disappearance of Flynn, complete with archive footage also featuring the computer-generated character. Though the use of this technique is obviously an indicator of the filmmakers' and computer animators' confidence in their ability to effectively represent a younger Bridges without confusing or discomforting the audience, the obvious nature of Flynn's computer construction (which later mirrors CLU) suggests a bleeding together of the real world and that of the computer. Addressing the ability of computer-generated imagery to transcend the limits of human perception and lens-based photography, Manovich insists: "synthetic computer-generated imagery is not an inferior representation of our reality, but a realistic representation of a different reality".³³ This is a pre-scientific reality, a "cyborg" future where the distinctions between the real and the artificial have begun to blur. Manovich contends that ingrained societal fears accompanying the revelation of this unknowable future (represented by the hyper-real digital images of computer animation) is often alleviated by placing the digital image within an understandable context, in which the audience may, in a manner suggested by Comolli, disavow the disturbing qualities of the image. In the case of *Jurassic Park*, this disavowal was afforded by situating the film's subject matter in the context of Earth's past (dinosaurs) and by degrading the film's CG images—"their perfection [...] diluted to match the imperfection of [35 mm] film's graininess".³⁴ In the original *Tron*, the computer world of the Grid appears "unnaturally clean, sharp, and geometric looking", yet the confinement of the Grid to the internal fantasy world of a computer still allows for audience disavowal.³⁵ *Tron Legacy*, while featuring computer world that is aesthetically smoother yet matched to look like 35 mm film, negates *Tron*'s methods of disavowal by allowing the computer generated Flynn to exist in the real world and its computer counterpart. Thus *Tron Legacy* poses (accidentally) a disturbing look into this "alternate reality" of the future, where the aesthetics of the artificial have become one with the aesthetics of reality.

Tron Legacy concludes with a tracking shot following Quorra and Sam Flynn as they cross a bridge into the city, the sun dramatically rising behind them. The sequence serves to anchor the characters and the film in reality, and to document the fulfillment of Quorra's desire to see "a real sunrise", suggesting the film's ultimate thesis: the beauty of terrestrial reality greatly transcends the artificiality of the computer mainframe. This thesis is negated however by the filmmakers' concern for depicting the Grid as an elaborate, fully-formed space complete with weather, dimension, and color—a sleeker avatar of our own reality. The concern for elaborate cues of cinematic realism in *Tron Legacy* renders the dichotomy established between real and artificial a falsity, suggesting that no matter how rich one's imagination, it is inevitably rooted in an understanding of actuality. Attempting to understand the functioning of the reality effect in computer animation, Lev Manovich asks: "can we expect that cinematographic images [...] will at some point be replaced by very different images whose appearance will be

more in tune with their underlying computer-based logic?".³⁶ Applying the aesthetic of *Tron Legacy* to the query, the answer seems a resounding "no". But looking back to the pioneering computer animation of *Tron* (1982), one is able to identify a very real potential for computer animation to break the "paradox of digital visual culture [...] that although all imaging is becoming computer-based, the dominance of photographic and cinematic imagery is becoming even stronger".³⁷ *Tron* points freely to a synthetic image unbound by the constraints of human perception, an image that "can have unlimited resolution and [...] detail", an image where "everything is in focus [...] free of grain" with colors that are "more saturated".³⁸ Though the development and aesthetics of the synthetic image have closely followed that of traditional lens-based photography, *Tron* poses an alternate kind of representation that could provide for a wholly original art form.

Notes

- 1 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2001), 177-178.
- 2 It is important to note here that in discussing "realism" in the computer created images of the *Tron* films, two works of science fiction that take place within the fantastical world of a computer mainframe, I do not in anyway suggest that their narratives are in whole or part "realistic", or that they have real world equivalents. Rather, that the computer-generated fantasy worlds of *Tron* and *Tron Legacy* are constructed using conventional cinematic visual codes of realism- color, depth of field, shading, integration of human forms into space, in the creation of their worlds.
- 3 *Ibid*, 181.
- 4 *Ibid*, 184.
- 5 *Ibid*, 180.
- 6 Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Hugh Gray, Trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 35-36.
- 7 Manovich, 189.
- 8 *Ibid*, 183.
- 9 Fred Glass, "Sign of the Times: The Computer as Character in 'Tron', 'War Games', and 'Superman III,'" *Film Quarterly* 38.2 (1984-1985): 17.
- 10 *Ibid*, 18.
- 11 Manovich, 189.
- 12 *Ibid*, 179.
- 13 *Ibid*, 182.
- 14 Bazin, 21.
- 15 Manovich, 186.
- 16 *Ibid*.
- 17 Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," *The Cinematic Apparatus*, Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 123.
- 18 Manovich, 186.
- 19 Comolli, 141.
- 20 Manovich, 190.
- 21 *Ibid*, 186.
- 22 Ramin Setoodeh, "Where Has 'Tron' Gone?" *Newsweek*, December 2, 2010, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/12/02/the-mysterious-case-of-the-missing-tron.html>.
- 23 Manovich, 190.
- 24 David Bordwell and Janet Staiger, "Technology, Style, and Mode of Production," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), 243.
- 25 Manovich, 190.
- 26 Glass, 19.
- 27 William Paul, "The Aesthetics of Emergence," *Film History* 5.3 (1993): 322-323.
- 28 *Ibid*, 321.
- 29 John Belton, "Digital Cinema: A False Revolution," *October* 100 (2002): 100.
- 30 Manovich, 201.
- 31 *Ibid*, 194.
- 32 *Ibid*, 202.
- 33 *Ibid*.
- 34 *Ibid*.
- 35 *Ibid*, 201.
- 36 *Ibid*, 180.
- 37 *Ibid*.
- 38 *Ibid*, 202.

Powell Godard Scorsese

INFLUENCE—GENEALOGY—INTERTEXTUALITY

By LEIGHTON GRIST

This paper charts some connections apparent within the work of three filmmakers of different national origins who operated or operate within different institutional circumstances. In unpacking these connections, the paper, while implicitly underscoring the mongrel indebtedness of each cinematic instance, as well locates the discussed filmmaking, and its affiliation, with respect to shaping material and conceptual contexts. Further, as the overlapping careers of the considered filmmakers cover a period from the 1930s to the present day, so there is enabled not just a mapping of relations formal, stylistic, and in terms of subject matter, but the examination of wider—and historically more substantive—concerns political, epistemological, and ontological. Informed by an investment in the continuing, critical pertinence of certain modernist prescriptions and filmic practices, the paper proceeds ultimately to address the enormity of the associative phenomena of postmodernism and digital imaging, the implications of which regarding cinema are, arguably, fatal.



THE COMPOSED FILM, SCORSESE, AND THE NOUVELLE VAGUE (AND AFTER)

Michael Powell was fond of citing Rudyard Kipling's maxim 'All art is one, man—one!'¹ Such finds clearest expression in Powell's filmmaking through his notion of the 'composed film', in which 'music, emotion and acting made a complete whole, of which the music was the master'²—an approach that, while essayed during the conclusion of *Black Narcissus* (Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1947) and 'The Ballet of the Red Shoes' sequence in *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger, 1948), was, for Powell, 'finally achieved' in *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Powell and Pressburger, 1951).³

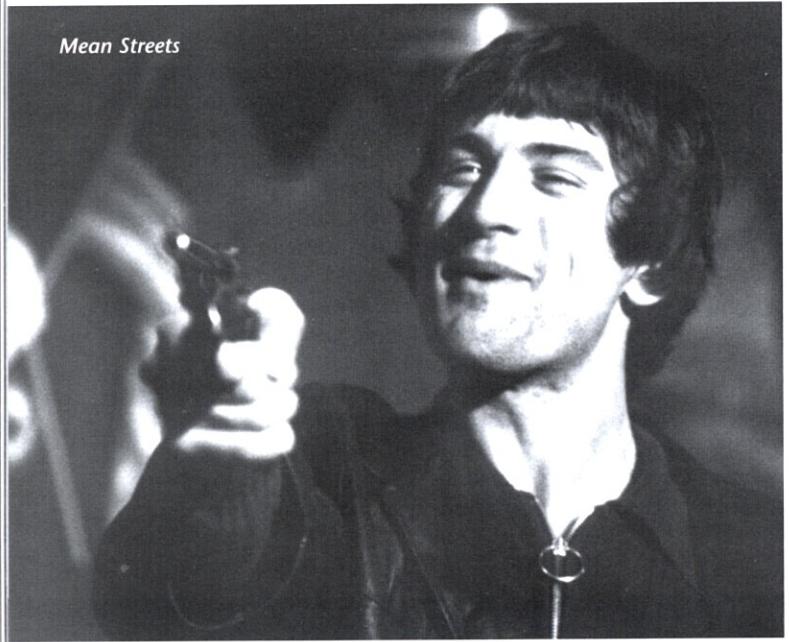
It is also an approach that finds recurrent reflection in the filmmaking of Powell's most famous champion, Martin Scorsese. Even excepting the concert films *The Last Waltz* (Scorsese, 1978) and *Shine a Light* (Scorsese, 2008), wherein shot selection is motivated largely by the specificities of the music that is shown as being performed, the idea of the com-

posed film resonates through differing scenes and situations across his work. Note, for example, among other instances, the slow-motion party scene in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (Scorsese, 1969), whose representation of eventually threatening masculine posturing is accompanied by Ray Barretto's 'El Watusi'; the scenes in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Scorsese, 1974) of Alice Hyatt (Ellen Burstyn) practicing and performing at the piano, during which camerawork and editing accord with her singing of various standards; the scene in *The Color of Money* (Scorsese, 1986) that shows Vincent Lauria (Tom Cruise) playing pool extravagantly to the accompaniment of Warren Zevon's 'Werewolves of London'; the sequence in *GoodFellas* (Scorsese, 1990) that represents Henry Hill (Ray Liotta)'s last, fraught, coked-up day as a gangster, in which action is closely attuned to recordings by Harry Nilsson, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Muddy Waters, and George Harrison; or the scene in *Bringing Out the Dead* (Scorsese, 1999) in which Frank Pierce (Nicolas Cage) drives maniacally with Tom Wolls (Tom

The Red Shoes



Mean Streets



One Plus One



Godard on the set of *One Plus One*



Sizemore), which proffers a close image-sound correlation of undercranked filming and The Clash's 'Janie Jones'. Nowhere, however, is the influence of Powell's attempts at the composed film more apparent than in *Mean Streets* (Scorsese, 1973). Witness not least the representation of the initial diegetic entries of Charlie (Harvey Keitel) and of Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro) into Tony (David Proval)'s bar, which are accompanied, to express empathetic effect, by a pair of songs by, again, The Rolling Stones, 'Tell Me' and 'Jumpin' Jack Flash'.⁴ Ancillary details, moreover, underscore the implication of Powell's filmmaking. The emphatic red lighting of Tony's bar—which, retrospectively a signal stylistic element of Scorsese's authorial discourse, Scorsese has admitted that he 'got' from Powell's films⁵—recalls that during the climactic scenes of *Black Narcissus* or the 'Tale of Giulietta' episode of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, while the use of slow motion harks back to the manipulation of shot speed throughout Powell's work. Likewise, the transition from church to bar interior that precedes Charlie's entry into the latter evokes the way in which, in *The Red Shoes*, late in 'The Ballet of the Red Shoes', the ballet's protagonist, danced by Vicky Page (Moira Shearer), is pulled by her magical shoes away from the steps of a church, and the embrace of a priest (danced by Ivan Boleslawsky/Robert Helpmann), to an infernal, red-lit space that is inhabited by the ballet's demonic shoemaker (danced by Ljubov/Leonid Massine).

In its apparent relatedness, the filmmaking of Scorsese yet demonstrates sundry divergences from that of Powell. Where Powell's work presents a characteristic combination of high Romanticism and orchestral scoring, that of Scorsese typically unites urban expressionism with rock or other popular music. In turn, as Powell's *œuvre* exemplifies a familiar Romantic recourse to sexual(ized) obsession and self-abnegating death, so Scorsese's centres upon a variable concern with class, ethnicity, and masculine social and psychosexual alienation. Further, while both Powell and Scorsese's work manifests an auto-referential interest in various forms of art and its production, that of Powell, although not lacking in reflexive elements, which obtain a late, elaborated foregrounding in *Peeping Tom* (Powell, 1960), largely persists, formally and epistemologically, within an at times baroque, melodramatic vernacular that effectively forecloses the very consideration of the material contingency of representation and meaning that the consistently reflexive, modernist filmmaking of Scorsese implicitly invites.

The divergences apparent within Powell and Scorsese's filmmaking invoke its contrasting historical and institutional determination. Powell emerged as a filmmaker in the 1930s and 1940s, within the circumstances of mainstream British studio production; Scorsese emerged as a filmmaker in the 1960s and 1970s, within the circumstances of the art cinema-informed New Hollywood Cinema. The influence of Powell's on Scorsese's work requires accordingly to be positioned within a larger genealogy, almost in a Nietzschean sense, to be situated as mediated by a number of other intervening templates, among the most insistent of which are *nouvelle vague* filmmaking in general and the *nouvelle vague* filmmaking of Jean-Luc Godard in particular.⁶ Interviewed contemporaneously, Godard averred: 'Generally speaking, reportage is interesting only when placed in a fictional context, but fiction is interesting only if it is validated by a documentary context'.⁷ Godard's work, like a deal of that of the *nouvelle vague*, is, correspondingly, marked by a combination of a reflexive, non-classical deployment of film style and syntax with the use of techniques and technolo-



gy that carry distinct documentary associations. A comparable combination is manifest within Scorsese's filmmaking, which also at times moves, similarly to that of Godard, beyond the documentary more specifically to imply, in its interest in social and cultural configurations and mores, the anthropological. As much is the case with *Mean Streets*, the opening of which condenses certain defining stylistic elements of Scorsese's early filmmaking and the relation of that filmmaking to the *nouvelle vague*. Following a black screen, a hand-held shot covers Charlie, with 'direct cinema' connotations, within a cramped, quotidian location as he moves from his bed to a mirror and back to his bed. However, as Charlie's head moves toward the bed's pillow, a pair of jump cuts, the second of which is synchronized with the non-diegetic introduction on the soundtrack of The Ronettes' 'Be My Baby', brings it nearer to the camera and spectator. This explodes the scene's 'documentary' implication through a forceful foregrounding of film syntax, an effect compounded by an ensuing, third jump cut, which, repeating, in closer scale, a shot of Charlie's head hitting the pillow, is synchronized with the song's first off-beat. Inherently reflexive, the jump cuts can as well be regarded to function, apropos of Scorsese's authorial discourse, expressionistically, as a heightening objectification of the unease suggested by Charlie's self-regard in the mirror. Reflexivity is, moreover, maintained as the scene cuts to the film's credit sequence, and a track towards and around an eight-millimetre projector, which shines into and returns the look of the camera. If the shot implies the credit sequence of *Peeping Tom*, which is preceded by and ends with shots of a 16-millimetre projector, then it in addition evokes the shot that opens *Le Mépris* (Godard, 1963),

over which Godard speaks the film's credits, and that represents a camera tracking toward then panning left and tilting down to return the look of the filming camera. It thus further extends the invocation of the *nouvelle vague* by suggesting an allusion to the itself allusive filmmaking of the *nouvelle vague*, which, according to Godard, was, apart from its effecting a 'new relationship between fiction and reality', defined 'through nostalgic regret for a cinema which no longer exists'.⁸

Discussing filmic allusions, Robert Kolker proposes that they 'serve a double or triple function': 'They constitute a celebration of the medium, an indication of a cinematic community; they enrich the work by opening it out, making it responsive to other works and making others responsive to it; and they point to the nature of the film's own existence'.⁹ While this underscores the reflexivity of the practice of allusion, it also introduces the already implicit notion of intertextuality, which, as developed by Julia Kristeva out of the writing of Mikhail Bakhtin, John Caughey succinctly defines as 'one text finding its meaning and effect in its relation to other texts'.¹⁰ Intertextuality, however, can have differing significatory implications. There is, as Peter Wollen notes, 'a use of quotation and allusion which simply operates to provide a kind of "surplus" of meaning', 'a bonus for those who catch the allusion'.¹¹ By contrast, intertextuality can be posited to afford a critical reflection upon signification and meaning, to invite, and sometimes impel, consideration of how a text, with inescapable ideological import, variously relates to, draws upon, re-inflects, and/or deviates from antecedent and extant texts and discourses. Both tendencies are apparent within the *nouvelle vague*. On one hand, the extensive adduction of films and other art forms has

the ‘surplus’ purpose of tacitly validating cinema as itself a particular, historically existent, and aesthetically credible means of expression. On the other, its revision of generic conventions, and thus of their underpinning ideological postulates, while often playful, instantiates a more questioning, interrogative engagement with the medium. In turn, Godard’s filmmaking, as it becomes increasingly and openly Brechtian and political in the mid- to late 1960s, extends even upon the intertextuality of the *nouvelle vague* as it alludes to, draws upon, and visually and audibly quotes from, *inter alia*, Hollywood cinema and philosophy, high literature and pulp fiction, newspapers and political treatises, painting and advertising images, and the music of, *inter alios*, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and, predating Scorsese, The Rolling Stones. For Wollen, moreover, during this phase of Godard’s work not only do ‘quotations and allusions’ begin ‘to take on an autonomy of their own, as structural and significant features within the films’, but their ‘juxtaposition and re-contextualization’ results less in ‘a separating-out of meanings’ than, with apposite didactic purpose, ‘a confrontation’.¹²

Godard’s filmmaking correspondingly educes Roland Barthes’s postulate that a text does not provide ‘a single “theological” meaning’ but comprises ‘a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’, that a text is, in short, ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’.¹³ Such also obtains tacit, reflexive corroboration in *One Plus One* (Godard, 1968), which represents characters registering words from the politically contrasting sources of a black power manifesto and Adolph Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* via, respectively, a tape recorder and a typewriter. The Brechtian reference of Godard’s work further reflects upon its genealogically complicating mediation of the relation of Scorsese’s to Powell’s filmmaking. For as Bertolt Brecht’s theatrical practice sought to place the spectator in a position of critical distanciation, so he declared a need to effect ‘a radical separation of the elements’ that are typically and operatically ‘“fused” together’ in the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* or ‘integrated work of art’,¹⁴ a form that the composed film expressly attempts to emulate. As much is acknowledged by Powell himself, who observed that, on *Black Narcissus*, he ‘started out almost as a documentary director and ended up as a producer of opera’, ‘in the sense that music, emotion, image and voices all blended together into a new and splendid whole’.¹⁵

That noted, Barthes’s notion of what constitutes a text is, ironically, outlined as part of an anti-authorial polemic, although one that, suggestively, with respect to the considered period of Godard’s filmmaking, seeks, as it sets the reader at the centre of the semiotic process, and invokes his or her engagement with a text’s material bases and components, to render reading a political act. Irony accrues in that Barthes’s writing is, no less than Godard’s filmmaking, insistently authored. It also returns us to the need to position any author’s work in relation to its historical and institutional determination: albeit one must needs acknowledge that such determination is invariably fissured and often contradictory, and that the relation of any author’s work and that determination remains, always, irreducible. Nevertheless, Barthes’s writing—conceptually, ideologically, epistemologically—is indicative of a larger, contemporaneous modernist turn within French literary theory. Godard’s filmmaking can similarly be referred mutually to developments within the French and European art cinema institution and to coeval, and in part reflective, shifts within culture, thought, and

politics, with his films affording, as perhaps befits a former film critic, practically a metadiscourse upon the same. Indeed, Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe declare as ‘remarkable’ the ‘closeness’ of Godard’s 1960s output to its ‘contemporary moment’—‘his films are inextricably locked in with the moment of their making, existing on the sharp edge between observing the world taking and changing shape and, in giving it concrete form in representation, being part of the changing shapes’.¹⁶

Moreover, as Scorsese’s filmmaking is likewise attributable to its informing context, so this obtains a reflexive underscoring in that filmmaking’s thematic emphasis on its characters’ cultural determination.¹⁷ Complementing its formal and stylistic reference, Scorsese’s oeuvre, in its representation of class, ethnicity, and gender, is, in turn, indicative of larger historical developments and tensions within the USA during and beyond the mid-to late twentieth century. Further, if Scorsese’s filmmaking is, ideologically, not unequivocally progressive, then its familiar intensity and engaged willingness to work through the often unsettling and consistently layered connotations of what it represents nevertheless carries a potentially progressive charge. Compounding this, Scorsese’s output through the 1980s into the 1990s partakes of a more overt Left-liberal inflection, situating itself, diegetically and extra-diegetically, in varying degrees of explicitness, in alterity to the Right-wing hegemony that enabled and underpinned the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush Snr—as is demonstrated differently by *After Hours* (Scorsese, 1985), *The Color of Money*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Scorsese, 1988), and *GoodFellas*.¹⁸

CASINO—AND LE MÉPRIS

This ideological tendency is extended in *Casino* (Scorsese, 1995), a film that as well compacts and enables a textually specific consideration of a number of the concerns of this paper thus far. With respect to this, *Casino*, as it presents distinct parallels with *GoodFellas* as to casting, style, and narrative, in part demands that we read it, in its similarities and differences, intertextually, with, in terms of Scorsese’s filmmaking, typical modernist connotation, through its relation to the anterior film. *Casino* is set mainly in Las Vegas. Correspondingly, not only does its relation to *GoodFellas* besides invoke formally that between *The Godfather, Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) and *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972),¹⁹ but in the latter films the expansion of the Corleone family’s operation into Las Vegas is represented as being implicated with an increasing interconnectedness of criminality, business, and politics. A similar critical focus is apparent in *Casino* and helps, historically, to place the film’s textual recourse to and evocation of *GoodFellas*. Part of the significant gangster film cycle of the late 1980s and early 1990s, *GoodFellas* presents an historically displaced critique of the excesses and depredations of Reagan and Bush era USA. *Casino* revisits comparable ideological preoccupations on what Scorsese dubs ‘a much larger canvas’,²⁰ and implies an analogously displaced reflection upon its historical moment that—an apparent cultural shift Leftwards and the election as president of Democrat Bill Clinton notwithstanding—had seen the American stock market recover from its 1987 crash to foster another speculative, materially baseless boom. The result is what Jonathan Romney terms ‘one of the most trenchant late 20th-century films about money’,²¹ within which Las Vegas functions as a pungent metaphor of speculative financial-capitalist acquisition, being, as Nicolas Saada puts it, ‘a superb economic machine, where money works to make more money’.

without passing through the reassuring filter of industry or the market economy'.²² In illustrating the performance of this 'machine', *Casino* has, moreover, been seen as being markedly 'Godardian'²³ as it represents the collection, circulation, and expropriation of money, demonstrates the skimming of monies by the Mafia, and outlines the structures of power that inform the running of the fictional Tangiers Casino—this while intimating the collusion of illicit and licit authority that underpins that power. However, while the film's attendant documentary-cum-anthropological implications complement its Godardian suggestiveness, they besides call to mind a genealogical antecedent mutual to the work of both Godard and Scorsese: that of the filmmaking of Roberto Rossellini, whose later output, but in particular *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* (Rossellini, 1966), Scorsese has admitted as an influence.²⁴ Accepting this, the relation of Godard and Scorsese via *Casino* obtains supplementary modulation through the phantom presence of Godard's abandoned script 'The Story'. Planned as a project involving Diane Keaton and familiar Scorsese collaborator De Niro, who stars in *Casino*, 'The Story' concerns the production of a film about Bugsy Siegel, the mobster who has been seen to be the founder of modern Las Vegas.²⁵ Siegel is also the subject of the biopic *Bugsy* (Barry Levinson, 1991), regarding which *Casino* has further been positioned critically as embodying a mordant filmic corrective.²⁶

Like *GoodFellas*, *Casino* correlates the historical and the criminal with the marital and the familial. Concordantly, in its representation of the relationship between Sam 'Ace' Rothstein (De Niro) and his wife Ginger (Sharon Stone)—whom Ace effectively 'buys', and who reciprocally and materially works to exploit him—*Casino*, to quote Saada, 'describes the impossibility of love in a society rotted away by money'.²⁷ Intertextually underscoring both this and the film's Godardian reference is the adduction within *Casino* of *Le Mépris*, a film in which scriptwriter Paul (Michel Piccoli)'s marriage collapses after he, with undecided, but possibly mercenary intent, leaves his wife Camille (Brigitte Bardot) in a potentially compromising, sexually exploitative situation with film producer Prokosch (Jack Palance). Hence the use of Georges Delerue's yearning, melancholic 'Thème de Camille' from his score for *Le Mépris*, mainly, and mainly anempathetically, to accompany scenes involving Ace and Ginger—music that, for Kolker, 'once deciphered' lends *Casino* 'an extraordinary emotional aura'.²⁸ There are besides allusions to specific incidents. Paul's suspicious questioning in *Le Mépris* of Camille's mother over the 'phone concerning whether she had lunched with Camille is reworked in *Casino* in Ace's questioning of Ginger regarding whom she had lunched with, while Paul's immediately subsequent listening to Camille's 'phone conversation with her mother behind a closed bedroom door is recalled as Ace surreptitiously listens to Ginger as she demands, on the 'phone, his killing: a recontextualization that renders the allusion, in near textbook Freudian fashion, uncanny.²⁹

Paul's later words on approaching Camille as she sunbathes, nude, on the roof of Prokosch's Capri villa, 'I feel as if I'm looking at you for the first time', are in addition evoked by those heard over the 'phone by a tearful Ginger on her wedding day: 'I'm looking at you right now. I'm seeing you for the very first time right this minute ...' Words spoken by Ginger's sleazy adolescent crush, Lester Diamond (James Woods), to whom she appears to be self-denyingly devoted, we, moreover, hear them—in a complex correspondence of situation, sound, and image—as we see Ace look at her. The incident connects with



Le Mépris



Le Mépris



Le Mépris



Casino



the significant relation within *Casino* of looking and power. This has been discussed in terms of the panoptic system that Michel Foucault extrapolates from Jeremy Bentham's panopticon model of prison design.³⁰ Frequently mediated, diegetically, through visual technology, it also carries more reflexive, film-theoretical implications; namely, those connected with the gendering of looking and power within the work of Mulvey, the fundamental premisses of which regarding subordinating objectification can be extended to other contexts informed by

inequities of situation and standing.³¹ Such reflexivity returns us to the influence on Scorsese's filmmaking of the *nouvelle vague* in general and, once more, of Godard's work in particular, as well as to the adduction of *Le Mépris* by *Casino*. For as *Le Mépris* is explicitly concerned with the film industry, but through this implies a broader situation of capitalist exploitation,³² so *Casino*, as it is explicitly concerned with capitalist exploitation, correlatively suggests the operation of the film industry, about which, according to Gavin Smith, there is 'an ambivalence' that

'works its way through the film'.³³ In turn, if *Casino* embodies a late instantiation of a particular, densely allusive modernist film practice that has its roots in the *nouvelle vague*, then it no less presents an often intensive articulation of the non-classical editing, different shot speeds, enhanced lighting, and rapid and/or extended camera movement that is stylistically distinctive to Scorsese's filmmaking. Threatening, for Smith, 'to topple the movie into pure hyperbolic gesture', this is besides regarded by him, consistent with the film's industrial connotations, as a manifestation of an embattled creative imperative, an attestation of its *auteur's* presumed 'sense of moviemaking—or movie business—crisis'.³⁴

The urgency of expression that is invoked stylistically and otherwise within *Casino* can, however, be seen as having an ontological and epistemological rather than industrial basis. Ontologically, the point of reference would appear to be that of the increasing digitalization of film and cinema.³⁵ Computer-generated imagery (CGI) is first employed within Scorsese's filmmaking in *Cape Fear* (Scorsese, 1991), with its use increasing subsequently in concert with its expanding prevalence within Hollywood cinema. In *Casino* it is applied in part to recreate the external appearance of the Las Vegas of the 1970s.³⁶ At the time, Scorsese bemoaned the apparent 'disposable' virtuality of digital images, complaining that 'there won't even be a negative to go back to'.³⁷ That noted, the broader issue is implicitly that of representation and, epistemologically, the shift from modernism to postmodernism, from, that is, a mode that foregrounds the material contingency of representation to one that denies its very fact. As Tony Wilson states: 'To investigate the transparency of the image is modernist but to undermine its reference to reality is to engage with the aesthetics of postmodernism'.³⁸ In turn, if in Scorsese's *œuvre* a critique of postmodernism is apparent, as witness, variously, *The King of Comedy* (Scorsese, 1983), *After Hours*, and the Scorsese-directed 'Life Lessons' episode of *New York Stories* (Scorsese, Coppola, and Woody Allen, 1989),³⁹ then the modernism-postmodernism polarity obtains an ontological parallel in the epochal shift from analogue to digital technology, and its concomitant substitution of the indexical trace with the algorithmic code. Comparable theoretically is the replacement of Althusserian Marxism as, socially and culturally, a preferred explanatory framework by the writing of Foucault. For while the latter's relativizing of power, its refusal to ascribe it any distinct locus, vitiates its political use value, it is—in its ingratiating insinuation of a fallacious empowerment that disavows a larger political complicity—comfortably, and comfortingly, consistent with the practices and dissimulations of postmodernism and postmodernity. Such also makes Foucault's panoptic system far from being the most fitting notion through which to approach *Casino*, which is, at the very least, narratively clear about the material source of the economic exploitation that it represents.

SHUTTER ISLAND, AND THE DEATH OF CINEMA

Regarding these issues, and as a means of effecting provisional closure, we might advance to *Shutter Island* (Scorsese, 2010), a film that presents a corresponding, conjoined reflection upon matters ontological, epistemological, and political. Described by Romney as being rare, in 'the CGI age', in its 'awareness of the complexity of meaning that accompanies' the 'new manipulability of images',⁴⁰ the film can be seen to flag its ontological concerns during its opening ferry scene, which is in part played out before a computer-generated version of 'unconvinc-

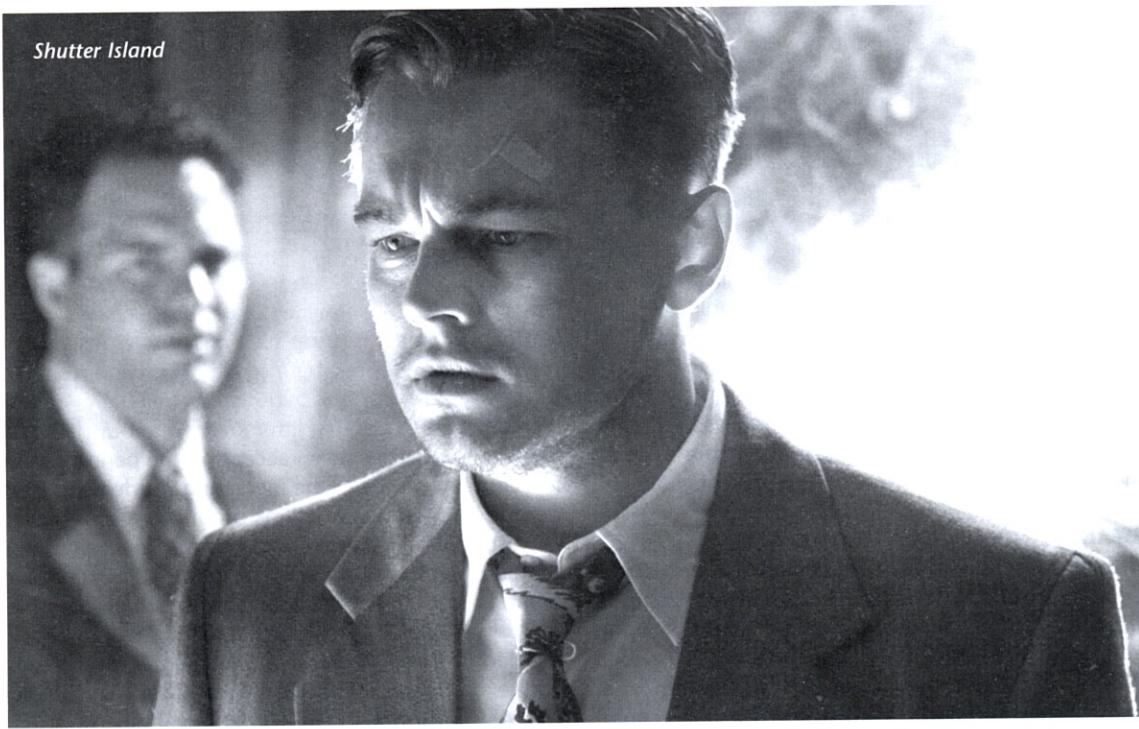
ing' back projection. Moreover, while such visual highlighting of the contingency and factitiousness of what is shown is variably maintained subsequently by the film's often CGI-suffused *mise en scène*, this is not only complemented by *Shutter Island* being narratively and expressionistically restricted, like some other films directed by Scorsese, to the perception of its protagonist, Teddy Daniels (Leonardo DiCaprio), but capped by its declared actuality being referred to as an instance of 'radical, cutting-edge role play'—as being, that is, effectively designated, with, epistemologically, due postmodernist connotation, a simulation, 'a real without origin or reality'.⁴¹ Set in 1954, the film invokes and makes extensive mention of redolent historical and political events and speculations—the Second World War and the Holocaust, post-war Nazi-American collaboration, the Cold War and Korea, H-bomb testing, the House Committee on Un-American Activities—and has a character, Rachel Solando (Patricia Clarkson), declare, suggestively with respect to post-9/11 USA, that '50 years from now, people will look back and say here, this place, is where it all began'. Yet as the credibility of exterior reference is severely compromised by the film's ontological and epistemological implications, so *Shutter Island* critically bears out Fredric Jameson's prognosis, apropos of postmodernism, that we are faced with 'an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way'.⁴² Further, the more any evident diegetic reality is diminished, the more the film becomes allusive, with *The Red Shoes* once again being invoked. Thus the two shots of Daniels's legs as he ascends a steel spiral staircase recall those of Vicky as she descends a like structure, and his tender removal of one of the red sandals of his putatively drowned daughter, Rachel (Ruby Jeris), recalls that of the dying Vicky's red ballet shoes by her husband, Julian (Marius Goring). However, with any historical relation having been eroded, such allusions, in their intertextuality, serve mainly, though pointedly, to emphasize the text's fictionality.

The conclusion of *Shutter Island* is suitably ambiguous. Upon pondering whether it would be worse to 'live as a monster, or to die as a good man', Daniels gives himself over to lobotomized, although whether this is in guilty acknowledgement of his claimed murderousness or an expression of defiant self-affirmation in the face of the 'truth' that he has uncovered is unclear. While this upholds to the end the film's central concerns, there are strong intimations that their reference exceeds that of Scorsese's work alone. Consider, for example, to cite two very different, CGI-informed films also released in 2010, the difficulty of material relation self-consciously posed by the multiple realities presented by *Inception* (Christopher Nolan) or the numerous, admittedly parodic, but literally and knowingly incredible set pieces that litter *Knight and Day* (James Mangold). Similarly suggestive, even accepting the period's shaping political context, has been the increasing incidence during the past decade of documentary films produced and achieving theatrical distribution. In turn, the excess manifested regarding representation within *Casino* can, in terms of Scorsese's career, be seen in recent years to be replaced by an excess of representation, as his ongoing making of theatrical features has been augmented by that of a clutch of documentaries—on the blues, the Statue of Liberty, Bob Dylan, Elia Kazan, Fran Lebowitz, and George Harrison⁴³—as well as a foray into large-scale television production with *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010–). Debatably reflective of both Scorsese's hard-won ability to get such projects made and his age and related, lessening time, this never-

Shutter Island



Shutter Island



theless reverberates symptomatically with the larger representational problematic that constitutes its context.

It is with respect to this context that we can return, finally, to Godard and to Powell. No less, if contrastingly, symptomatic of that context is Godard's late *magnum opus*, the multi-part *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98), which, taking allusion and intertextuality to what is, to date, conceivably its limit-point, might be read as a complexly critical but ultimately valedictory paean to that cinema 'which no longer exists'. Powell, meanwhile, who once asserted that '*I am simply cinema*',⁴⁴ died in 1990, almost, perhaps, along with cinema, or at least cinema as we have known it.

Notes

- 1 The words, which derive from Kipling's story 'The Wrong Thing', serve, for example, as the epigraph to the second volume of Powell's autobiography; see Michael Powell, *Million-Dollar Movie: The Second Volume of His Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1992), xii.
- 2 Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 584.
- 3 Ibid., 581. Powell acknowledged that the term 'composed film' was not his, but was coined by an unnamed 'Swiss film producer who produced a film called *The Robber Symphony*, and showed it in London at the Queen's Hall' before the Second World War (*ibid.*, 582).
- 4 As defined by Michel Chion, empathetic music expresses 'its participation in the feeling of the scene, by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone, and phrasing' (*Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, 1990, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 8).
- 5 Martin Scorsese, 'Foreword', in Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London: Waterstone, 1985), 11.
- 6 Writing of his concern with 'the genealogy of our moral prejudices', Friedrich Nietzsche proclaims a 'need' for 'a critique of moral values', and that 'for this purpose a knowledge is necessary of the conditions and circumstances out of which these values grew, and under which they experienced their evolution and their distortion' (*The Genealogy of Morals*, 1887, trans. Horace B. Samuel, Mineola: Dover, 2003, 2, 5).
- 7 Jean-Luc Godard, 'Interview with Jean-Luc Godard' (1962), in *Godard on Godard*, ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, trans. Tom Milne (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 192.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman*, 3rd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187.
- 10 John Caughey, 'Introduction', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 205. For an account of the development of the concept of intertextuality, see Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, post-structuralism and beyond* (London: Routledge, 1992), 203–6.
- 11 Peter Wollen, 'Counter-Cinema: Vent d'Est', *Afterimage*, no. 4 (Autumn 1972), 12.
- 12 Ibid., 12–13.
- 13 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' (1968), in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 146. Barthes is, plainly, writing about literature. His claims can, however, be just as plainly be applied to other forms of signification.
- 14 Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre (Notes to the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*)' (1930), in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 37.
- 15 Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 583.
- 16 Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe, 'Images of Women, Images of Sexuality', in Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 84.
- 17 See Leighton Grist, *The Films of Martin Scorsese, 1963–77: Authorship and Context* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).
- 18 See Leighton Grist, *The Films of Martin Scorsese, 1978–99: Authorship and Context II* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 19 For an outlining of the formal parallels apparent between *The Godfather* and *The Godfather, Part II*, as well as across the *Godfather* trilogy as a whole, see Peter Bondanella, *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 235–71.
- 20 Stephen Pizzello, 'Ace in the Hole', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 76, no. 11 (November 1995), 35.
- 21 Jonathan Romney, 'Martin Scorsese', *Screen International*, no. 1479 (3 December 2004), 24.
- 22 Nicolas Saada, 'The Abyss of Hallucinations' (1996), trans. not cited, in *Projections 7*, ed. John Boorman and Walter Donohue (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 30.
- 23 See, for instance, Serge Toubiana, 'Demolition Job' (1996), trans. not cited, in *Projections 7*, 33.
- 24 See Ian Christie and David Thompson, eds, *Scorsese on Scorsese*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 187–88 and Roger Ebert, *Scorsese by Ebert* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 203.
- 25 For a description of 'The Story', whose outline implies some suggestive similarities to *Casino*, see MacCabe, *Godard*, 32–33.
- 26 For a critical comparison of *Bugsy* and *Casino*, see Richard Lippe, 'Style as Attitude: Two Films by Martin Scorsese', *CineAction*, no. 41 (October 1996), 21.
- 27 Saada, 'The Abyss of Hallucinations', 31.
- 28 Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, 188. Chion defines anempathetic music as that which exhibits 'conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner', adding that this 'has the effect not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it' (*Audio-Vision*, 8).
- 29 Sigmund Freud writes, 'the uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it' ('The "Uncanny"', 1919, trans. James Strachey, in *Art and Literature*, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, 368).
- 30 See Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, 205–6. The account of the panoptic system is in Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).
- 31 For Mulvey's much-cited arguments regarding gender, looking, and power, see Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 6–18.
- 32 See, for example, Richard Roud, *Godard*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), 28–31.
- 33 Gavin Smith, 'Ten Thousand Light Years From Home: Scorsese's Big Casino', *Film Comment*, vol. 32, no. 1 (January/February 1996), 63. Further to the shared obligation of Godard and Scorsese's to Rossellini's filmmaking, *Le Mépris* besides makes allusion to and invites comparison with *Viaggio in Italia* (Rossellini, 1953). Posters for and stills from *Viaggio in Italia* are shown in *Le Mépris* outside and within the lobby of a cinema that is represented as screening the film, while narratively *Le Mépris*, like *Viaggio in Italia*, centres upon an unhappy couple that is 'adrift' in Italy.
- 34 Smith, 'Ten Thousand Light Years From Home', 63.
- 35 For an extended, theoretically informed consideration of the relation of film to digital technologies, see D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 36 For details of the application of digital images in *Casino*, see Ron Magid, 'Visualizing a Vintage Vegas', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 76, no. 11 (November 1995), 43 and Mark Cotta Vaz, 'The Lights of Las Vegas', *Cinelex*, no. 64 (December 1995), 37–38, 140.
- 37 Thierry Jousse and Nicolas Saada, 'Martin Scorsese interviewed' (1996), trans. not cited, in *Projections 7*, 10.
- 38 Tony Wilson, 'Reading the postmodernist image: a "cognitive mapping"', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Winter 1990), 396.
- 39 See Leighton Grist, '"You a Graffiti Artist": The Representation of Artists and the Visual Arts in the Film-Making of Martin Scorsese', in *Framing Film: Cinema and the Visual Arts*, ed. Steven Allen and Laura Hubner (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 185–200.
- 40 Jonathan Romney, 'Shutter Island', *Sight and Sound*, n. s. vol. 20, no. 4 (April 2010), 74.
- 41 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.
- 42 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July/August 1986), 68.
- 43 The films are *Feel Like Going Home* (Scorsese, 2003), which is in addition part of a series of films on the blues that Scorsese executive produced, *Lady by the Sea: The Statue of Liberty* (Scorsese and Kent Jones, 2004), *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* (Scorsese, 2005), *A Letter to Elia* (Jones and Scorsese, 2010), *Public Speaking* (Scorsese, 2010), and *George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (Scorsese, 2011).
- 44 Powell's comment was made in an interview with Bertrand Tavernier and Jacques Prayner in *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, no. 20 (October 1968); it is translated in Christie, *Arrows of Desire*, 23.

Crimes of Mike Recket

AN INTERVIEW WITH
GABRIELLE ROSE AND BRUCE SWEENEY

By ALLAN MACINNIS

When David Spaner's book *Dreaming in the Rain: How Vancouver Became Hollywood North By Northwest*, was published in 2003, BC film seemed at a particularly promising juncture. Several new Vancouver-based filmmakers were receiving critical acclaim and beginning what one might hope were long careers in Canadian film. Auteurs dealt with at length by Spaner included Bruce Sweeney, Mina Shum, Lynne Stopkewich, John Pozer, and Reg Harkema; all were cited as rising talents who would put BC on the map of the Canadian film industry, making films that were not only shot in Vancouver, but set here. These films were not just cause for regional excitement, but attracted international attention. Lynne Stopkewich's 1996 film *Kissed*, for instance, won awards in Spain and Italy, and was widely distributed on VHS; I remember my pleasure at regularly finding copies of it on the shelves of video stores in Japan—once in a section labeled "Canadian."

Cut to 2012, and much of this sense of promise has dissipated. Filmmakers one might have hoped would rise up to become international figures in cinema—Canada's next Atom Egoyans or David Cronenberg—have all but stopped making feature films. Since 2003, Mina Shum, Lynne Stopkewich, and John Pozer have worked in TV or made shorts; according to IMDB, their last feature films were, respectively, made in 2002, 2001, and 1995. While the shift to television is understandable—as Gabrielle Rose said after my tape stopped rolling, "you have to work!"—it's also somewhat sad that arts



Detectives Lyle Eszchuk/Ryan McDonald and
Shane Knost/Paul Skrudland, *Crimes of Mike Recket*

funding and the Canadian film industry are such that filmmakers with such talent and successes behind them should have to seek employment elsewhere to stay solvent. The ongoing collapse of video rental chains, which could usually be counted on to stock the occasional Canadian indie title, has made the situation even more complex, as it has become increasingly difficult for the general public—especially those who live in areas at a remove from arthouses and film festivals—to access what BC feature films have been made.

The situation is not entirely grim. Both Lynne Stopkewich and Mina Shum have new features in development—Shum makes mention of two on her Facebook page, and Stopkewich, contacted for this essay, says she is “researching and writing” her next film.¹ Reg Harkema has made some highly visible films since 2003, like *Monkey Warfare* (2006) and *Leslie My Name is Evil* (2009)—although both were made after he relocated to Toronto, making him less visible as a regional voice (his upcoming film, a BC-shot and—set adaptation of Vancouver punk/writer John Armstrong’s book *Guilty of Everything*, re-titled *The Rebel Kind*, may help change that). Tom Scholte—dealt with only as an actor in Spaner’s book—directed an excellent, Vancouver-set feature, the 2008 Dogme film *Crime*, though it would remain low-profile, making a few festival appearances and, aside from some Superchannel screenings, getting little in the way of distribution; it remains unavailable on video². Carl Bessai, who is barely a footnote in Spaner’s book, has been very active in Vancouver the last few years, making several features, including *Mothers & Daughters* (2008), *Fathers & Sons* (2010), and *Sisters & Brothers* (2011)—though all are also somewhat challenging to see. Perhaps most excitingly, a few new BC filmmakers have risen up in the realm of genre and exploitation fare, with Panos Cosmatos (*Beyond the Black Rainbow*, 2010) and Jen and Sylvia Soska (*Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, 2009; *American Mary*, 2012) making particularly strong impressions, and getting notice outside BC (*American Mary* has been picked up by Universal Pictures International for distribution). However, these films are not explicitly set in Vancouver; *Beyond the Black Rainbow* is deliberately crafted to have no regional identity whatsoever, while *American Mary* is shot in Vancouver but set in Seattle, with various details of life Americanized.

Despite such projects, it says something that, of the group of filmmakers focused on by Spaner, only one has remained both active and local all along, making independent Vancouver-set feature-length films every few years: Bruce Sweeney. After early successes with *Live Bait* (1995), *Dirty* (1998), and *Last Wedding* (2001), Sweeney lost some critical standing with the somewhat problematic 2007 feature *American Venus*—a film whose greatest virtue—an unforgettable, unhinged performance by Rebecca De Mornay as a gun-obsessed Mom from Hell—is also its greatest failing, since it overpowers the rest of the film. Nonetheless, he has continued to make compelling, powerfully acted small-budget movies that are very consciously set in Vancouver, like 2009’s *Excited*, a rich ensemble film about a man (Cam Cronin) who suffers from premature ejaculation, trying to negotiate the multiple pressures placed on him by his family, friends, and new girlfriend; and 2012’s *Crimes of Mike Racket*, which stars Nicholas Lea as a morally compromised, unemployed, and increasingly desperate ex-realtor being investigated for his role in the disappearance of a Vancouver homeowner. Both films co-star iconic Canadian actress and frequent Atom Egoyan collaborator Gabrielle Rose, who remains an active force in furthering the cause of BC film, appearing—in-between

small roles in American productions and TV work—in independent features by Carl Bessai, Traci D. Smith, Bruce Sweeney and others.

I spoke to both Bruce Sweeney and Gabrielle Rose shortly after the 2012 VIFF screening of *Crimes of Mike Racket*. Those concerned with spoilers may wish to see that film before reading what follows; it is a genre film, and while it richly rewards multiple viewings, it does contain an element of mystery and suspense.

PART ONE

Bruce Sweeney

Allan Macinnis: If we can start with your first film, *Live Bait* (1995)—that was a student film for UBC, right?

Bruce Sweeney: That’s right, it was my Master’s thesis film.

A: It’s been awhile since I’ve seen it—do I recall reading that it was autobiographical?

B: Yeah—though as with anything you make, it wasn’t totally; there’s a bunch of fiction, and a bunch of real life, but what I think was very accurate was this notion of a man who is incomplete until he has a sexual awakening, that kind of opens up the film. And he does that with this woman who is 70 years old—or late 60’s, hard to say.

A: And you started working with Babz Chula and Tom Scholte right from there.

B: That’s right, yeah. And the older woman was Micki Maunsell—the fabulous and late Mickey Maunsell.

A: What sort of method were you using—it’s a very scripted film?

B: At that point, for sure. Very scripted. I wrote it very traditionally, and shot in the summer of 1993. And I shot on black



Bruce Sweeney on set

and white, which is quite an easy way to shoot. You know, people say, "why is it black and white." One reason is aesthetic: I love black and white film, so I thought it was perfect for me. But on another very practical level, as a filmmaker, you have to go into situations where, without a lot of set decoration, you couldn't even shoot. You know, the carpets are a putrid kind of orange, and you're fucked, right? But with black and white, it instantly made things right, and allowed us to put the money into just getting the performances. Which is the way I've always tried to do it. I know there's a lot of people who, when they get into making a film, it's just infinitesimal, all the things they have to work out. Whereas I don't really concentrate that much on the background, as much as the foreground and dialogue and what the characters are doing. You can move characters around to different settings, and still get great results, because people hang in the pocket of the story. If they're in with the story, they can make a lot of things right, and not worry about a lot of things. And you know—you're trying to do it on the fly, and with not a great deal of money, and you try to just follow the through line of the movie and just make that your guide.

A: How did it end up getting distributed on VHS? That's surprising for a student film.

B: Well, we went to Toronto, and won the award for Best Canadian Feature, and as soon as that happened, that really was great in terms of getting the film out there.

A: What filmmakers were you looking at when you made it?

B: I was really into a lot of Renoir, and a lot of French New Wave. Also Woody Allen and Henry Jaglom and Robert Altman. All the filmmakers that I liked that tried to go for more of a

behavioural kind of approach.

A: It kind of surprises me that you mention Jaglom and not Cassavetes...

B: AND Cassavetes, yeah—Cassavetes was huge for me. I went on a massive tear (of his films). He was a huge influence. Not so much stylistically, in terms of how he set up his shots, because he did a lot of stuff which was very idiosyncratic and very much his own way. I think stylistically I like to say, "Okay, I've got the blueprint that I like from Renoir," right? Just more of a real-time aesthetic and mise-en-scene and try to make your beats work out without cutting. But Cassavetes as a maverick was instrumental in getting me psyched up about cinema.

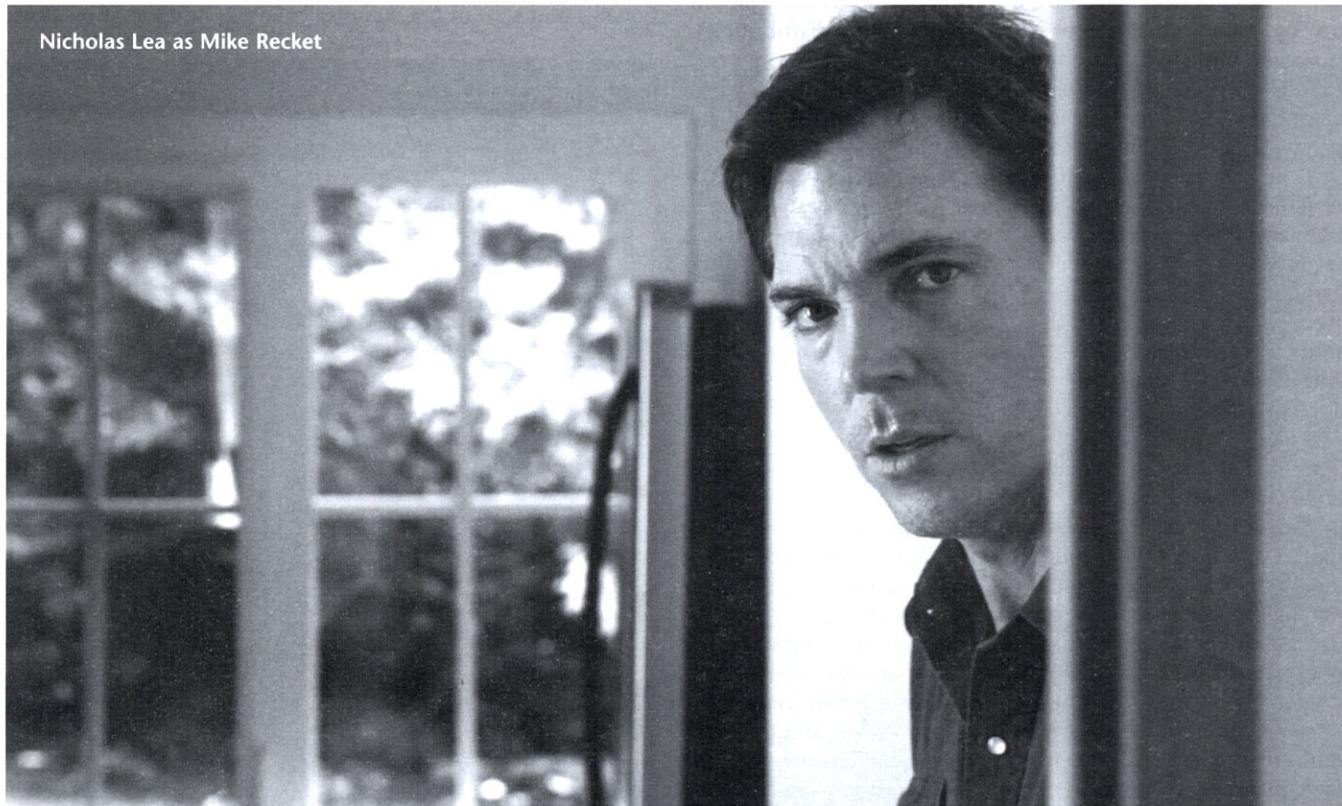
A: Do you aspire to be an "actor's director?" (A term that has been applied to Cassavetes).

B: Absolutely. For the simple reason that I love actors. I do a lot of hanging out with actors—I have a ton of friends who are actors, and I'm interested in their process. If they say, "this feels right," or "this doesn't feel right," I go with them, because they're investing in their character. And if they say to me, "my character wouldn't say that," I rework it, so it reflects their input into it. Because they go the distance, and if they go the distance... I want to make it a two-way street. And I think a film is richer, if you make it a two-way street.

A: Was Mike Leigh someone who was on your radar before you did the forum with him (in 1991, as organized by the Vancouver International Film Festival)?

B: He was, and I watched the films, but I didn't really know how he did what he did, in a technical way. I remember going

Nicholas Lea as Mike Recket



to see *High Hopes* (1988) at (Vancouver independent movie theatre) The Ridge. Then in 1991, the Master's Class with him was a real kicker. He was very open and matter-of-fact and not guarded at all.

A: Can you talk about what you did with him?

B: It was very simple. He'd just go through scenes, and he'd put the scene up and we'd watch it, and then he'd say, "I'll give you an example of the birth of this scene." And he walked us through his methodology, which was about writing the script with the actors, where he would sort of set the scenario. He would work with them beforehand about their super-objectives and their objectives in the scene; then he would just do the scene after giving the actor the set-up, and he would record this, and end up writing the script with the actors based on that.

A: Did you do any writing or filmmaking as part of the class?

B: No, he kind of set it up and—it was, very thorough, but it was, like, "The Mike Leigh Show." And everyone was into it.

A: So that was in 1991. Then in the early 1990's, you met Gabrielle Rose and Babz Chula during the same shoot—you were doing sound on a Mike Hoolboom film (*Valentine's Day*, 1994), right?

B: That's right.

A: How did you feel about first approaching Babz Chula to act in your first feature?³

B: I was nervous, I was a wreck. I'm pretty much a wreck in a lot of things in my life... But with her, I was just so warmly welcomed. She was just an incredible woman and an influence—profound, actually.

A: How old were you at that point?

B: I think I was 30 or 31. Then when it came out in 1995, I was 33.

A: Did you learn a lot from her?

B: I think I learned everything that I needed to know from Babz! ...because I didn't know a ton of people at that time. And she knew everyone; everyone would, at some point, drift through her house, and I'd say "I'm looking for an actor to do this part..." And she'd say "okay, it's like, this, this or this." She lived a big, fat life, and a lot of people were in it, and I was just kind of happily along for the ride. The Babz Chula ride.

A: I love her in *Dirty*. It must have been quite different, for you, to put "the Mike Leigh approach" into action, compared to what you'd been learning at UBC and what you'd done in *Live Bait*.

B: Well, it was really quite—I can't say I did it like Mike Leigh. I still like to sit down and have my time to write, and I don't want to write it with the actors in the same way. I'm more into trying to get it down, and then workshopping with the actors and using the actors to enrich the material and bring some authenticity to it. But I like [the writing] part of that process—I want to retain a sense of authorship.

A: Right.

B: But what we did with *Dirty*, we had the Anza Club for like, six weeks—it was great. We had Tom (Scholte) and Ben

(Ratner) and Babz and Marya Delver and we rehearsed, and we improvised, and I put all these improvisations on tape, and wrote the script based on what happened. But going from an outline—just an outline/treatment.

A: There was something that Tom Scholte had written, too, wasn't there?

B: There was a play that Tom had written called *Bingo Sweethearts*, which we didn't use for the film, but I guess it had this relationship between a woman who is older and a guy that is younger, which has always been a dynamic that I've been fascinated with. But the play didn't make it into the movie. And Babz had her own ideas about what this woman should be like, and very much put her stamp, her imprint on this character.

A: So the characters in the case of *Dirty* are really coming from the actors.

B: In the case of *Dirty*, for sure. Like, the Nancy Sivak story, the bulimia story is right from Nancy's life... maybe she doesn't want me to say that—she's not bulimic or anything. But I was so drawn into this story that she told me that it just played into the film about different dysfunctions. And the story of the personal bankruptcy—we just wove that in.

A: This may be embarrassing—but my favourite scene in the film is the cunnilingus scene (Benjamin Ratner's character, given to emotional outbursts, explosively asserts his attraction to a co-worker by unexpectedly going down on her during a break). Where did that moment come from?

B: Well, at the core of it, it's an awkward thing, because obviously it's overtly sexual, but there's this idea of the blowjob being this big thing to get on-screen, and I was just so bored with the idea of a blowjob on-screen that I thought, we gotta do it this way—it's far more fascinating.

A: With *Last Wedding* (2001), it's a far more of a scripted film, I gather. Why did you move away from the *Dirty* approach?

B: Well, with Tom and Babz and Nancy, it was really an amazing experience. And then I tried to do that again and it was not so amazing. And I just thought—well, you know, I'll just write this effing thing, and then workshop it, and do it that way.

A: But you've kept some of the methods you've learned from back then.

B: For sure, for sure.

A: Can you tell me about working with Gabrielle Rose?

B: I've known her for a very long time, through Babz Chula. And she's in a ton of plays and everything, so I go to her plays, and you just keep in contact with people. I think she's incredible to work with. Basically I'll go over to Gabe's house and we'll have some tea and read the sides and she'll just break them down into beats, and then she does her homework on it and shows up ready to go.

A: You've said that your favourite scene with Gabrielle in *Crimes of Mike Recket* is the one where she confronts Recket. Why is that?

B: Just because when we shot that scene—I think it's a really strong scene, and when she came, she was ready to go, just

with the look on her face. Sometimes the actors show up, there's a little chitchat, and you have a coffee or tea... but this time she showed up and she was so ready. So we just shot right away, and the scene went on her momentum that she'd showed up with, and I was just enthralled with her performance there.

A: It was a long shoot, right?

B: Yeah, well—sometimes you write stuff and the pages just fly off, and other times you're just scratching your head. It's slow and tedious and punishing. And it was more like that for me, this time—because *Crimes of Mike Recket* was out-of-genre for me. What do I know about crime? What do I know about policemen? What am I doing tackling this genre? So there was a lot of self-doubt, and thinking "what am I doing, doing this?"

A: Was there a specific impetus for making a genre film?

B: Well—I was just watching a bunch of Melville—have you seen *Le Cercle Rouge*?

A: I've only seen Le Samourai and Army of Shadows.

B: I was watching a bunch of Melville and I thought, I've got to make a detective movie. So I got all hyped up on this idea of making a detective movie and then I realize it's incredibly hard! It's a real pain in the ass—and I don't know, but I think you have to complete projects that you start, or otherwise you'll just go insane, and then you won't make anything. Plus I hadn't done anything non-linear before, so I found that very difficult. You've seen it in a billion movies—they cut back in time, and it's like a puzzle, and you gradually reveal pieces of the backstory to bring us up to the present. I had a lot of wrestling with that, too—at a certain point, I went with it, but there was a lot of just spinning my wheels, trying to get it right.

A: How did you research the cop angle?

B: With the Paul Skrudland character, there was this detective, Detective Sergeant Jim Smyth, and he was the lead interrogator in the Russell Williams case. Williams was the Air Force guy who killed those women in Ontario, and he was a sexual fetishist and so forth. And Smyth had this style that I really love. And you can get this online—type in "Russell Williams interrogation" and you get to see this guy work. And I was just struck by a couple things—the ordinariness of the room, just a table and microphone on the table, and he would probe and kind of buddy-up with him, but there was no intimidation of any kind. It was all just, "well, here's the situation"—all very matter-of-fact, right? And Russell Williams is a bizarre dude, and clearly he's got some psychological issues. And I wanted the lead character to sort of inhabit the body of that detective. And he did that, and I thought he was solid. As soon as Paul saw the interrogation, he said it gave him the go-ahead: *bang, I know what to do now.*

A: I'm curious about the names in the film. Like, the Detective is Shane Knost. It's an unusual name, but it's also evocative. He "knows," he's a "nose"...

B: Yeah, the name "Knost"—I don't know why, for some reason, I just love it. And because it's not a common name, it's easy to clear.

A: Aha! Because I was wondering if there was allegorical meaning—like, Mike "Wreck It," or "Leslie Klemper," which is so unflattering—a name fit for a victim.

B: Yeah, but they're also names you get cleared that day! "Leslie Klemper—available!" ...Anything with more forms is just horrible.

A: Was there a specific story or case that the land-title fraud/ identity theft theme came from?

B: It seems it's kind of taken from a newspaper headline or something, and that's right, it is, actually. Not the love story or anything like that, but—it's a crime film, and you think, *what is the crime and how is it done and et cetera*, and I thought that this one was great: some fraudsters key on property that has no mortgage. So basically this character (Mike Recket) just goes on the property net—the land title registry, I guess he hacked his way in there—and found out all the addresses that didn't have mortgages. So he scoped them all out, thought "this one's really tasty," so I'll just identity-thieve my way through this property and take out a mortgage on it. But he's not a well-honed or well-oiled criminal, right. He's just a guy turned to fraud, and that's kind of a problem.

A: You've said you have some sympathy for the character of Mike Recket—that he's not, as Gabrielle's character says in the film, a sociopath.

B: I do have sympathy for him—I do think he has sociopathic tendencies, but I feel like there's also a strong sense of remorse. I think there's remorse—I think he does realize that he has reached something he can't get past. Thematically, I tried to work it into a sentence, what I think the theme of the movie is, and this one is: "some mistakes you can't get past." It's basically the story of a guy who is kind of a good looking guy, who is now middle aged, and he's a happening realtor; but then his world implodes, there's an economic downturn, and he has to think on his feet. And when he does that, he ends up committing this inadvertent murder. I really wanted it to be an inadvertent murder, because if it's premeditated, how can you have any remorse there? So I wanted to construct a character—he's a hot tempered guy, he's got a hair trigger, and in the heat of that moment he ends up killing this woman. But all he wanted was the money—he wanted to slash and burn his way out of Vancouver and out of debt, but his plan is all very ill-conceived and sloppy...

A: Do you intend the film to contain a criticism of Vancouver?

B: You talked about that before, and I think that is true—I wanted this, uh, texture... You travel around the world and you fly into Vancouver and it's beautiful, you're confronted with the beauty, but I wanted to contrast the beauty with a character who has a very dark interior, a guy who represents a certain side of Vancouver—the real estate developer, the out of control... I'm searching for the word here...

A: The sleazy side.

B: Absolutely.

A: Was there any significance to the fact that you were shooting during the 2010 Olympics?

B: I think so—I don't really have anything really overt to say to that, other than I think, anytime you make anything, there's things that represent big money, and you have this small act that goes against that, because it doesn't have any economic weight, or it doesn't have any "world class" value to it...

A: Do you feel Vancouver cinema culture has supported

you? I really like *Excited* and *Crimes of Mike Recket*, but it seems they're much lower in visibility than *Dirty* and *Last Wedding*.

B: It's hard for me to phrase this exactly—I think I know what you're talking about, but for me, personally, in the relationships I need to have to function, with the festival and the programmers, I feel a lot of love. With people at Telefilm and Terry McEvoy at VIFF—I've felt the love from them, for sure. But maybe my work is just insignificant or something? There is some sense that with West Coast cinema, with Lynne Stopkewich and Mina and myself, we got some attention, and it was really quite marvelous; but there's also this sense that it's very much over, though. And that's there, that's true.

PART TWO

Gabrielle Rose

Allan Macinnis: What are your impressions of Bruce Sweeney?

Gabriele Rose: He's hilarious. He's very very honest; he's an extremely frank human being. Like, sometimes we're not used to that in this day and age. We're used to people couching their feelings in a whole lot of platitudes.

A: How did you first meet?

G: Michael Hoolboom was directing a film—it was the second film we did, called *Valentine's Day*. We did two films together, Babz [Chula] and I, with Michael Hoolboom. One was *Kanada*, spelled with a K, and the other was *Valentine's Day*, and these were both very no-budget, experimental films, where Babz and I were lovers. And *Kanada*, I think, boasts having the longest ever kiss.

A: In Canadian cinema, or in cinema in general?

G: I don't know if it's in cinema, but it sure feels like the longest ever kiss, when you watch it... And Bruce was very young and he was doing sound on the second film, and that's how Babz and he started to connect, and they did a bunch of films together. And then a fairly short time ago, Bruce phoned me up and said he would be interested in me playing a part in one of his films. And that was *Excited*. I jumped at the opportunity, because I love his work.

A: What was the first film of his you saw?

G: It was *Dirty*. Marvelous film.

A: Yes! Did you feel you missed out on the chance to work in the method he used for that film?

G: I've missed out on that era, for sure; I don't know if I was even in town for some of it. But I don't think I have really—*Excited* was scripted, but we did indulge in quite a lot of improv when we were rehearsing. What we would do—I just came in for the shoot, but he came over to my place and we'd film some of the rehearsals that we did, and then I'd improvise, and then he'd go away and re-write some of it. So I was involved in some of that process. And then with the last film, *Crimes of Mike Recket*, he had a very clear idea, and then it got sidetracked, somewhat; life got in the way of it. I mean, that's what happens when you're working with little budget. People get work, and move, and trees get chopped down, and things change. So for



Gabrielle Rose as Mimi in *The Adjuster*

quite a large part of the process for my story—not anybody else's, because I didn't know what other people's stories were, only knew what my story was—I had quite a lot of input. The ideas were Bruce's, and he did most of the writing, but I was involved in the evolution of that part of the story, mainly through improvisation and discussion.

A: So over the two years or so of the shoot, you saw the script evolve a lot?

G: Yes, but I mean, there wasn't a script—there were some sides, and you'd get the sides and we'd go to shoot that scene. But other than knowing the vague story of my character—who is a single, middle-aged woman, living by herself, completely self-sufficient, who owns her house outright, and who meets a younger man and is swept away in that embrace—other than that, I really didn't know anything of the story. I didn't know what Nicholas' storyline was, I didn't know what Agam Darshi's storyline was. I knew there were detectives—I knew what happened to me, because that was a huge discussion we had right from the start.

A: That you would be victimized.

G: I would be. (Laughs)

A: When we spoke at the VIFF screening of the film, I mentioned that I really admired your bravery, and part of that is

that you seem to be willing to take on extremely unflattering roles, where your characters are deglamorized or humiliated or victimized, as Leslie is. *Speaking Parts* would be another example, where your character is really put through -

G: —the ringer. I think I am attracted to sort of the “dark side” at times. And I don’t mean that in my real life; in my real life I like things to be pretty bright and clear and lacking in stress, so I’m quite willing to explore it in my acting career. I think it makes for really interesting characters. There’s a part of all actors that wants to be loved and liked, and it can make us go in a direction that perhaps we don’t want to go ultimately, which is to simplify characters and not have too much substance. Because nobody is all one colour; nobody is all good. Even the best of all people have darker natures, perhaps in their private life, and we don’t know about it. Now, having said all that, Leslie is actually a really great person. She’s actually one of the clearer characters that I’ve played in my career—who just happens to have the misfortune of running into Mike. But yeah, I like things to be a little bit convoluted.

A: And Leslie Klemper’s home in the film in the film is actually your house, in the film...? I hope we can mention that.

G: Yeah, it’s fine! My house has actually appeared in four or five films now. It’s sort of the star of the low budget indy features, and I think it should get an award, quite frankly... I’m kidding (laughs). But it was in *A Gun to the Head* (Blaine Thurier, 2009), it was in *Mothers & Daughters*, it was in *Fathers & Sons*. It’s been in a number of films.

A: It’s like the Vancouver equivalent of the Cassavetes’ home, or something.

G: Well, it’s free. And you know, the thing is, I have two boys who are pretty rambunctious, and I’m not a Martha Stewart—I’m not a big housekeeper. In fact, I’m pretty pumped because I cleaned out part of the laundry room today. I’m trying to clear all the spaces that are stagnating, but I’m not a great housekeeper, I don’t have a lot of pride in my home, so I don’t mind people coming in and clomping about.

A: It looks so presentable in the film.

G: In *Fathers & Sons*, there’s a scene where one of the sons says to Blu, whose house it is in the film, “what the heck is that up there?” And what had happened was, it’s lath and plaster, and the plaster had started to sag; and the kids would play underneath there, because the dining room is used as the playroom, and this is when my kids were much younger. So Hrothgar (Mathews), my husband, got up on a chair or a ladder and pulled it all down, and it created this sort of space—like a distressed space on the ceiling; you could see the lath and the plaster was gone, and there were interesting sort of shapes. I can remember when I was pregnant with my second child, lying on the sofa and looking at these shapes, because I had to lie down for three weeks, and becoming quite enamoured of it (laughs). So it stayed, for, like, ten years. We finally got that ceiling done after the actor said “What the heck is with the hole in the ceiling?”

A: That’s cut from the final film, I hope?

G: I think that is out of the final film, but I remember seeing the rushes and going—“ohhhh. That’s sort of embarrassing.”

A: Did the fact that you were acting the role of a homeowner in your own home help you as an actress?

G: It meant that I didn’t have to get up very early for any of my scenes! (Laughter). And people came to me. The drag was—I had to tidy up, and I needed to get the kids’ stuff out of the way, because she didn’t have kids. But Bruce was very good: “just put it all in the corner, and we just won’t shoot that corner.” Still, it’s good for my soul to have to clean up now and then.

A: If I could ask about one particular moment in the film—my favourite moment in the film was when he’s just started flirting with you, and you get somewhat flustered, and then come back and tell him to “stay.” (Laughs). Where did that come from?

G: That was just me fooling around, because my character has this great huge hound, and I take the dog for a walk four times a day, and that’s my life, you know; me and my dog, we are a team. And so I figured she, in her relationships with people, might use dog language. It wasn’t in the script—it was just something I enjoyed.

A: How do you prepare for roles?

G: Prepping a role is always an interesting thing. When I did *Excited*, I had a bit of notice—not a lot, maybe two or three weeks. Enough to sort of visualize... when you have a skeleton crew like we have, on these films, there isn’t a costume designer. There’s a production designer but the production designer is dealing with locations and getting places for Bruce to shoot, and making sure they look like the way they want them to look. So the costumes have been kind of left up to me, on both of these films. So with *Excited*, when I read the bits of script that I got, I had a vision of the woman and I went to my Mom. I saw her as a woman who was a bit stuck in the 1980’s, and—not that my Mom was stuck in the 80s, but at the time she was in her late 80’s, so her clothing that she really loved and kept was from the ‘80s; so I borrowed her fur coat and things like that, which most people don’t even have. She’d had it in mothballs for 25 years, but couldn’t bear to throw it away. So I started from the outside, and then spent time with the character to bring her inside. With Leslie, it was much easier, because I just went, “She’s you,” except maybe a nicer side of me. When I say that I didn’t go to many dark places with Leslie, I didn’t, because I felt that it was simpler for her to just be a really straight-ahead person—a regular gal who lives on her own, her husband has died, she’s self-sufficient, she writes the odd book that brings in some income, she probably has some pension, she’s got her house... everything is set in her life, and then it’s blown apart. So I just used that part of my nature. Her clothes are my clothes—I didn’t go to anybody else for her; she didn’t require much prep.

A: Is this sort of freedom to develop your character unusual in your experience, say with other filmmakers?

G: It depends on who I’m working with and what the script is and whether or not it’s low-budget indy or a regular film. In a large-budget film, all of those people are in place—so in Atom’s films, for example, the costume designer would phone me and we would have long discussions. For instance, with *The Sweet Hereafter*, the costume designer and I spent ages sending pictures back and forth, and the same with *The Adjuster*—because those are really extreme characters. It takes

awhile for me to get into them, even though the bus driver (in *The Sweet Hereafter*) was really close to me, was another part of my nature—a Kamloops girl, where I was born. In *The Adjuster*, Mimi is very, very out there. So those people were really really helpful in helping me create my characters. Do I miss them? Yes. Is it more challenging? Yes. But it's a great challenge working on these films—I love working on these films.

A: I just re-watched *The Adjuster* last night, actually. I'm curious—what did Atom tell you about Bubba and Mimi, about who they are and what they're up to?

G: The first time I read the script, the Bubba and Mimi scenes were just little things—a weird couple doing weird things. And then we had many meetings over the weeks, and those scenes became developed into the characters they were. And then Maury Chaykin and I spent, I think, a weekend together—or certainly a day together—discussing who we were and what our relationship was. And then Atom came and joined us, and we had a big long talk about that, and it became more developed. And Maury and Atom had been developing Bubba, and Bubba was becoming much more prevalent through the film. And so it was a work in progress...

A: What did you arrive it...?

G: So they're twins.

A: Really!

G: Yes. And there's that thing where there's the twin that's a little more adventurous and wants to do weirder and weirder things, and the other one goes along with it...? So my character is the slightly evil twin, who wants to do these weird, marvelous, sort of sexual things, and I want Bubba to record them and to facilitate them. So he's sort of like the pimp to my evil twin.

A: Twins. I never would have gone there! (laughs). Do you have moments in your career that you're proudest of, that really stand out? Because you've been in a lot of films.

G: The current one is always my favourite, but definitely *The Sweet Hereafter* and *The Adjuster*... and I really enjoyed *Excited. Mothers & Daughters* has to be one of my favourites, too, because I basically created that character—that was a challenge that Carl Bessai put out to the three women, Babz, Tantoo (Cardinal) and myself, that we come up with our own little storylines for the film, so we did. I'm really proud of that film.

A: So you didn't do that with *Fathers & Sons* and *Sisters & Brothers*?

G: Not in *Fathers & Sons*, that was already done for me. And then *Sisters & Brothers*, that was a fun story. Carl had had another storyline in mind, but I think somebody got a big job—I can't remember quite what happened. But I was going in to be in the film, just to be part of it—a “Gabe and Ben” (Ratner) scene. I think I was a nurse or something. And while I was there, he said, “What are you doing on Monday?” “Nothing—why?” “Well, I’m thinking that we’re going to make a storyline with you and a couple of daughters, so meet me on Monday with the girls and we’ll come up with something.” Well, maybe he didn’t exactly say that—but over the weekend we were just emailing back and forth ideas, and we all met on Monday and brain-

stormed, came up with a story, and shot it Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday! So we were a late addition.

A: But you're fonder of your role in *Mothers & Daughters*.

G: Yeah. I mean, I like Marion in *Sisters & Brothers* but I didn't get as married to her. I didn't have the time. Learning to love your characters is also about being given time to live with them a bit. When you're cast in something, often you don't get any rehearsal, or you might not see the script for two or three days or a week before. It's not enough time to really truly develop something—you can't. But when you really get to get in there and swim and muck about, it's fun.

A: All the films you've mentioned are Canadian films. Do you feel more of an investment in the Canadian films you've done, as opposed to American films?

G: I haven't done that many big roles in American films.

A: I want to see *Timecop* (1994)—I don't care if it's a Jean Claude Van Damme film, it's Peter Hyams!

G: I only did one day on it.

A: *Double Jeopardy* (1999)...

G: *Double Jeopardy* was on last night. Again, a tiny part. Wonderful director, Bruce Beresford. And I had a little tiny part, and he got me to improvise, and it was great fun, but again, I only did a day and a half on it, you know? I did an American film recently, a horror film called *Grace* (2009). It's really good. And I'm not a horror film person; I appreciate the genre, but I get nightmares so I don't watch it very much. But I love my character in that, and he was a magnificent director, Paul Solet. It has a really close-to-the-bone scene that I find unbelievably embarrassing, at my age—there's nudity, right? So I live in fear that my eldest son will see it...

A: Anything else we should mention? Upcoming projects?

G: I'm actually going to do the next Bruce Sweeney film.

A: The sports talk movie—*The Dick Knott Show*, with Tom Scholte?

G: Yeah. And that's a scripted film. It's going to be fun—and that's a darker character, though it's more comic than *Crimes of Mike Reket*. Which I thought had a droll aspect to it—it's a lovely part of the film... One of the things about Canadian cinema is that it's really difficult to get things off the ground, so I'm really grateful that Bruce is willing to go the distance.

With thanks to Helen Yagi, the staff of the VIFF, and Adrian Mack.

Notes

1. “Feature films didn’t pay enough for the time I spent researching, writing, shooting, posting, festing and releasing,” Stopkewich writes, explaining her move to TV. They also require “a two to three year financial and emotional commitment... I would rather make films the way I want to make them, when I want to make them, and with the folks I want to work with, than churn out a film every few years ‘just because.’ Over the years, I have had numerous feature films in development but the pieces did not come together in the way I wanted, so it was easier to step away then deal with stressful scenarios I could not control.”

2. See my interview with Tom Scholte about *Crime* (and about his work with Bruce Sweeney) on my blog: <http://alienatedinvancouver.blogspot.ca/2010/03/tom-scholtes-crime-vancouver-dogme-to.html>

3. Babz Chula’s account of meeting the young Bruce Sweeney can be found in *Dreaming in the Rain*, pp. 151–152.

Occupiers, Collaborators and Resisters

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF'S CALM AT SEA

By GEORGE P. LELLIS and HANS-BERNHARD MOELLER

The publicity campaign for *Calm at Sea*, which premiered on the European network ARTE on March 23, 2012, shows a teenage boy strapped to a pole about to face a firing squad. (See illustration 1.) The seventeen-year old in an ill-fitting sweater is a portrayal of Guy Môquet. Known to French schoolchildren through a farewell letter that is read every year on the anniversary of his death, Môquet is the most emblematic character in the new movie by German director Volker Schlöndorff. But he is only one figure among many in a portrayal of political violence that is at once both small and localized in its treating of a specific incident and yet broadly evocative of issues of national identity and questions of moral responsibility.

Historically, Guy Môquet's execution, along with that of several dozen of his fellow hostages, can be seen as the start of the major eruption of the French anti-Nazi resistance. Indeed, the very title of the film, *La mer à l'aube* in French, or *Das Meer am Morgen* in German, is explained in the final voice-over which talks about a quiet morning prelude to a day of tempests and fierce agitation. Schlöndorff celebrates Guy Môquet as a martyr.

Calm at Sea develops and expands many of the ideas and preoccupations of Schlöndorff's previous films. Having earned his reputation as a director of skillful adaptations of challenging literary works like Robert Musil's *Young Törless* (1966), Heinrich Böll's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum* (1975) and Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1979), Schlöndorff in the 21st century, has turned more toward recent history. *The Ninth Day* (2004) looked at Catholic priests in the Dachau concentration camp, and *Strajk* (2006) examined the contribution of Anna Walentynowicz to the Polish Solidarity movement. Inherently humanistic, these treatments of literature and history seek inspiration in the books, plays, and heroes of our cultural tradition.

At its worst, such reverence for great books, great ideas, and great people can become a substitute for serious and inventive cinematic thinking. *Calm at Sea*, however, shows that in the hands of a director who can defamiliarize the images and ideology of the World War II era, the genre of the historical film can become both a mode of personal reflection and a means of philosophical exploration. It presents a view of the world that is neither dogmatically ideological nor nihilistically relativist. Rather, it explores the moral contradictions inherent in both the idealism of the committed and the pragmatism of the conformist.

By working within the conventions of the made-for-TV movie, Schlöndorff in *Calm at Sea* has been able to make a movie that seems at once to embody the director's personal his-

tory and provide for a nuanced and currently relevant presentation of the Nazi occupation of France from the perspectives of the German occupiers, the French collaborators and the French resisters. Two cornerstones of what one might call the public television sensibility are those of literary adaptation and historical reconstruction. This tying of cinematic expression to a traditional educational function seeks to legitimize the apparatus and cultural practices of nonprofit television as central to producing informed and sensitized audiences. *Calm at Sea* works within these sometimes stodgy conventions to use them to advantage.

The film takes place in an internment camp near Nantes in the Bretagne during the occupation of France. After three anti-Nazi terrorists assassinate a German military officer, orders come in from Berlin that 150 hostages must be executed in retaliation. The audience sees how this order affects the other German occupying officers, the French collaborationists with whom they work, the inmates of the camp, and the assassins themselves. All face moral dilemmas.

Schlöndorff drew his screenplay from three separate sources. First would be Ernst Jünger's *Zur Geiselfrage* or "On the Question of the Hostages," a secret dossier on German hostage executions in France, which he penned at the behest of the then head of the occupying force, General Otto von Stülpnagel. This dossier also includes Jünger's own translation of the Chateaubriand hostages' final letters to their families, including Guy Môquet's legendary last words. Schlöndorff here additionally makes reference to Jünger's biography and oeuvre. Jünger is a German 20th century novelist and diarist, most known for his WW I and WW II diaries and journals based on his military service. He is also respected as the novelist of *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939) and *Reflections (Strahlungen)*, 1948), and as a writer and military officer with close relations to France where he is perhaps even more appreciated than in his homeland. Jünger, played by Ulrich Matthes, appears as a character in Schlöndorff's film. He takes the role, archetypal to Schlöndorff's heroes, of not fully committed observer, comparable to Törless, Oskar of *The Tin Drum*, and Laschen, the journalist of *Circle of Deceit*.

Schlöndorff draws a sub-plot from a narrative by Heinrich Böll entitled *A Soldier's Legacy* (*Das Vermächtnis*, 1982) in which a young soldier who was wounded at the Eastern front arrives for service and recuperation at the Atlantic coast in France. The soldier echoes war experiences of Böll's service in France and of the Nobel novelist's wartime and post-war role as a dissident.

1. Guy Môquet being executed at the sta



The overt reference to Böll hence establishes the young soldier who struggles with matters of conscience as a counterpoint or contrast figure to Jünger, the neutral observer and loyal soldier.

Thirdly, *Calm at Sea* draws on Pierre-Louis Basse's *Guy Môquet, une enfance fusillée* (2000), a speculative essay filled with conjecture that the author called to the filmmaker's attention. From these varied sources, Schlöndorff establishes multiple points of view, those of the sophistic aesthete (Jünger), the victimized conscript (Böll), and the speculative historian (Basse).

It would be misleading to consider *Calm at Sea* as a biographical film solely about Môquet: He becomes a narrative place of entry into a portrayal of French communist party members and their internal struggles and uncertainties. As we watch Môquet, we learn that because his communist-committed father has been imprisoned, he has had to put aside ambitions to graduate high school and go to medical school. In this context, the character of Timbaud becomes particularly important. Timbaud is the leader in the particular barracks housing communist party members. He becomes a kind of substitute father for Môquet when Guy has been imprisoned for no worse than handing out communist party leaflets. Repeatedly through the film, we see Timbaud and

Môquet together in two-shots (Image 2). The older man becomes a mentor figure to the protagonist in a way that references, perhaps not without irony, the kind of cross-generational solidarity found in past print, stage and screen narratives of the Marxist tradition.¹ Together, Timbaud and Môquet respectively embody the most respected leader and the most junior member of the communist internees, a hierarchy made ironic by Môquet's winning of a track race in the first scene of the film, thereby proving himself the physically strongest of the lot.

Within Barrack 19 that houses the communists, we see a range of social types including workers, an engineer, teacher, physician, and a Vietnamese émigré. There is an array of social classes and education levels, but all are bound by their common political ideal. The most interesting comparison to Guy comes in the character of Claude, a student at the Sorbonne whose young wife comes to visit him. Claude clowns around with Guy and teasingly flirts with Guy's girl friend who comes to talk to him through the slats of the fence that keeps male and female internees apart. After Guy recites a poem by Lamartine to his beloved, Claude quickly trumps him by quoting a racier, more provocative verse. But the two young men, despite their clear class-differences, share a cultivated sensibility. Schlöndorff's vision of cross-class cooperation is doubtless idealized and occasionally seems to cite the poetic realism of Jean Renoir, Marcel Carné, or Jean Gremillon.

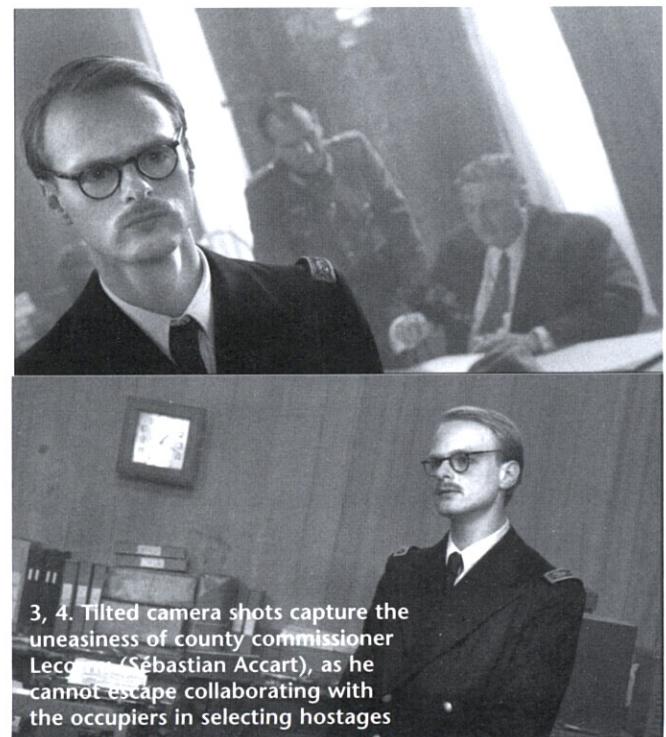
As with almost any war film or prison camp film, *Calm at Sea* is in part about defining masculinity, and the environment the movie presents is almost exclusively masculine. On a superficial level, one might see this as relating to Schlöndorff's personal history. In his autobiography, the director has commented on how, after the sudden accidental death of his mother, he was in an exclusively male household of father and brothers.² Such male-dominated universes occur regularly in Schlöndorff's work, from the boarding schools in *Young Törless* or *The Ogre* (1996) to the culture of Luxembourgian priests in *The Ninth Day* (2004), always with a thematic contrasting of violent and nonviolent masculinity. These are, of course, superficial correspondences that may simply point to the sources of the director's interest in the subject matter.

In looking back to a period of only ten years earlier than Schlöndorff's own adolescence and a location in western France where Schlöndorff went to boarding school, the narrative clearly has personal resonance for the director.³ In his autobiography *Licht, Schatten und Bewegung*, he reminisces "... it was barely a decade after the end of the war, there were still the [German] bunkers... at the beach, many of the parents had probably collaborated, others had been deported or had offered resistance. In any case, hardly a family was without their relatively fresh experience with the Germans" (45). And in the English-language press kit introducing *Calm at Sea*, he describes a classmate who had lived in Nantes on the rue du Roi Albert where a German officer was assassinated in front of his house in October 1941, resulting in shockingly brutal reprisals.⁴ More than half a century later, his roots and a story coincide to motivate him for a film project.

Schlöndorff's formative years in France distinctly shaped his personality and one cannot help but see a kinship between him and Jünger. As a personality whose ethos has one foot on either side of the Franco-German border, Jünger embodies the same transnational sensibility. Like Jünger, Schlöndorff has epitomized both national pride and Francophilia. Unlike Jünger, Schlöndorff is from a generation that has mistrusted and,



2. Timbaud (Marc Barbé) as the mentor to Guy Môquet



3, 4. Tilted camera shots capture the uneasiness of county commissioner Lecointe (Sébastien Accart), as he cannot escape collaborating with the occupiers in selecting hostages

indeed, eschewed militarism. In a previous movie like *The Ogre*, Schlöndorff has acknowledged, as did Jünger after 1933, the mythical, visceral appeal of fascism⁵ and the two artists have preferred to take a distanced and skeptical view of that attraction. Schlöndorff clearly would have more of an affinity with Böll's anti-heroism than with Jünger's heroism, but the director's setting up of a comparison between the two literary figures lends nuance to the movie's discourse. Schlöndorff refuses to polarize completely the comparison.

Jünger's ambivalent and morally questionable position is epitomized in the scene between him and Charmille, a fictionalized alias of Sophie Ravoux, his favorite paramour during his Paris years. Their discussion packs into a few minutes of conversation a basketfull of ideas and themes surrounding Jünger. He expresses his desire to settle in the French capital after the war, his vision of a united Europe, and his preference for being an observer rather than a participant in the acts of violence around him. He and Charmille also banter about his visits to prostitutes. Apart from the brief shots of Claude and his wife kissing, it is the one scene in the film with any trace of eroticism. Jünger comes to represent the worldly German, the sexual conqueror, the opportunist who places aesthetics over ethics.

If the scene with Charmille represents the culmination of the narrative set-up of the film, the key figure of the conclusion becomes the character of the priest, Abbé Moyon. The part is played by Jean-Pierre Darroussin, who is the closest to being a well-known star among the cast. That Schlöndorff saves Darroussin's appearance for the culmination of the story allows the director to exploit the gravitas of a familiar figure from the French screen. Abbé Moyon becomes the moral conscience of the film. We see this most clearly in the scene where Moyon argues to a German officer that executing the hostages will only further the cycle of retaliation and counter-execution. When the officer protests, "no politics," the priest asks him if he is a Christian. When the German answers "yes," the abbé responds: "Don't be a slave to your orders — listen to your conscience."

Striking in these final scenes is the respect shown between the priest and the communists. He offers his ministries humbly, respecting their right to refuse them. At one point, Timbaud makes an admiring comparison between the Christian martyrs and his comrades who are likewise about to sacrifice their lives for their beliefs. Are these mutually held attitudes a mode of thinking comparable to Ernst Jünger's, even though the latter's may be more aestheticizing? In his writings about war, Jünger would express admiration for the bravery and sacrifice of those he was fighting against. Thus, Jünger, Moyon, and Timbaud, all embody a humanism that trumps religious or political ideology.

In presenting a triangulation among Catholicism, Communism, and Fascism, Schlöndorff extends a tradition that goes back to Italian Neo-Realism. Just as the Neo-Realist movement owned common ground between communist and Catholic humanists, so does Schlöndorff. The critic Nick Wright has compared the movie to Roberto Rossellini's *Open City* (1945) in its use of interweaving story lines⁶ and Schlöndorff himself has described working with his young actors in a manner similar to working with non-professionals.⁷

As a Francophilic young German who reached adulthood right at the time of the French New Wave, Schlöndorff's work in the New German Cinema can partially be seen as an outgrowth of that earlier film movement, which in turn had paid frequent homage to the previous generation of Italian Neo-Realists. A significant element of the French New Wave includes

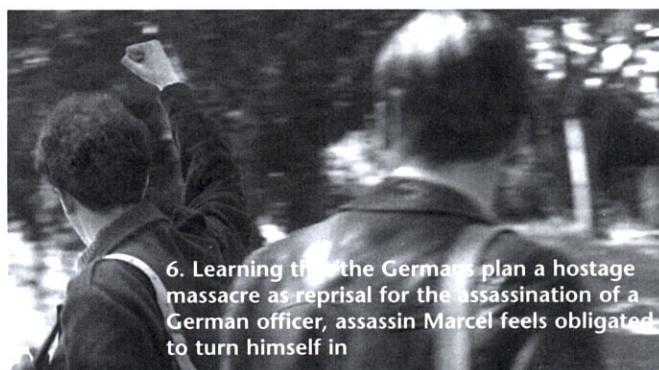
a group who came out of the tradition of French Catholic intellectualism. These include theorists and practitioners like André Bazin, Amédée Ayfre and Robert Bresson. This Catholic tradition links *Calm at Sea* to works such as *The Ninth Day*, and *Strike*, both of which positively portray Catholic faith as part of their main characters' experience. All three films were co-produced by Provobis, a German film distribution and production unit that, as a subsidiary of Tellux Holding, is closely allied with the Catholic Church.

As produced for television on a small budget, *Calm at Sea* can be seen as a 21st century version of the classic Hollywood B-movie. Critics such as Manny Farber or champions of a producer like Val Lewton have made the argument that small-scale movies often provide opportunities for creativity of a type that can be stifled under the commercial pressures of big budgets and calculated award seeking. Farber has made the distinction between what he calls "white elephant art" and "termite art." The former is self-conscious, overblown, and grandiose, whereas the latter is modest, unassuming work, "where the craftsman can be ornery, wasteful, stubbornly self-involved, doing going-for-broke art without caring what comes of it" (136). One might describe Schlöndorff's craft in the last ten years as being persistently termitic, chewing away from the inside at glib assumptions of culture.

Calm at Sea was shot in HD TV, and although the movie is stylistically restrained, it is filled with moments of striking texture and visual richness. The only stylistic mannerism comes in a repeated use of canted shots which create disruptive diagonals in two of the scenes that involve the discussions and deliberations of the German officers and their French collaborationist associates. (images 3,4.) Both scenes involve LeCornu, a young mid-level bureaucrat who must sign off on the killings and at first resists them. Perhaps aware of the often standard problem inherent in stagnant scenes of exposition displaying men in uniform standing and sitting around tables, Schlöndorff under-



5. A long-shot presents the roll-call of condemned hostages



6. Learning that the Germans plan a hostage massacre as reprisal for the assassination of a German officer, assassin Marcel feels obligated to turn himself in



mines the unease and the moral and pragmatic contradictions through this deliberate stylistic flourish. These scenes contrast to the relatively invisible stylistics of the rest of the film.

Unlike the standard pattern in movies commissioned for television, which often rely on dull medium shots and talking-heads close-ups, Schlöndorff's film contains meticulously detailed long-shots. Repeatedly these wide-angle compositions serve to re-enforce the sense of community among the prisoners. Consider, for example, the long-shot in which the prisoners are standing by their beds waiting to be summoned, one-by-one, to execution (Image 5). As each name is called, the prisoner named walks toward the camera. The effect is something like that of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., whereby the name of each fallen soldier is individually recognized. This earlier shot becomes echoed in one of the final images of the movie in which we see, in extreme long-shot, the final pistol shots to the heads of the third group of nine victims. Each shot occurs individually, but the victims are now anonymous.

The film's dramatic structure reflects this emphasis on collectivity over individuality. Creating what might be termed a "choral film," one that presents a multitude of characters representing different social positions and political commitments, *Calm at Sea*'s script regularly introduces new characters and presents through them nuanced contrasts to what has preceded. Thus Charmille, for example, provides a one-scene interlude contrasting feminine to masculine forms of submission to authority, or Abbé Moyon steps in near the end to give the narrative its moral compass. These sometimes fleeting characterizations stand in contrast to traditional, theatricalized dramatizations of good and evil.

This almost miniaturist approach leads to corresponding attitude toward performance. One of Farber's complaints of the "White Elephant" film is its emphasis on showy, overelaborated, attention-seeking performances. In termite style, *Calm at Sea* gives each of its performers a chance to create a character quickly and efficiently. This restrained, precise acting style may be in part a function of a narrative setting in which characters must constantly be guarded and wary. Ulrich Matthes stated in an interview that he played Jünger in an emphatically distanced approach.⁸ Or consider the economy with which Schlöndorff creates the character of Marcel, one of the three assassins who

later determines that he must turn himself in and confess to the crime in order to save the lives of the condemned prisoners. Schlöndorff shoots the scene in which Marcel announces his intentions largely in long-shot. As his two equally guilty comrades try to restrain him, Finnegan Oldfield, the actor involved, conveys the sense of moralism and self-sacrifice with a few passionate words, a crooked elbow, and a defiant walk. (Image 6) The scene plays out a moral dilemma with economy and without pomp or agonized underlining. A mop of curly hair iconically suggests a kind of proto-hippy idealism and innocence in contrast to the slicker pair who accompany him. Often a small detail of costuming or behavior catches the viewer's eye and sparks with meaning. The schoolteacher, for example, wears his necktie on an ordinary day. When Môquet's name is called for his execution, he answers like a schoolboy, "Present." Individual characters come to represent specific moral positions, as seen in the internal debates among the communists about the appropriate responses to the situation.

This portrayal of groups of men under repressed stress links *Calm* to the work of Schlöndorff's mentor, Jean-Pierre Melville. Although Melville has portrayed the German occupation in works like *The Silence of the Sea* (1949), *An Army of Shadows* (1969), and *Louis Morin, Priest* (1961, with Schlöndorff as assistant director and in an uncredited role⁹), he is most known for his portrayal of stoical gangsters who abide by their personal code of ethics. Schlöndorff's *Coup de grâce* (1976), which the younger director dedicated to Melville, is also the previous work that most explicitly cites Jünger. In this film which also features a war situation, the filmmaker fashions the lead, officer Erich von Lhomond, along the lines of Jünger's biography, especially his WW I military career and post-war ideological leanings. In addition, he integrates into the film episodes drawing on Jünger's war writings in *The Storm of Steel* and cites verbatim from *Battle as Inner Experience*.¹⁰

As in *Coup de grâce*, Schlöndorff shows sympathy even for those characters who make bad decisions and provides each character with his or her own reasons, a directorial attitude much like that of Jean Renoir, who himself worked more than once with stories in prison camp settings. While in no way exonerating the Third Reich, Schlöndorff brings to the WW II film and its prison-camp sub-genre a rejection of the usual

manichean dualities of heroes and oppressors. The movie avoids the familiar genre elements of a planned escape or an impending liberation. Rather, it implicitly proposes a vision of European integration and unity. On a linguistic level the movie switches back and forth between sections in French and sections in German, becoming transnational even at the risk of losing a segment of its potential audience. In the context of a Europe threatened by fiscal insolvency and divisive ethnic attitudes, *Calm at Sea* with its distinctively post-Cold War sensibility becomes prescient and relevant to 2012. In his press conference at the Berlinale, Schlöndorff described the film as portraying the beginnings of the contemporary united Europe.¹¹ He saw Europe as having advanced to a point where Germans can talk about French collaborationists and the French can talk about the German resistance.

At the January 2012 Biarritz festival of media pieces produced for television, the work was reportedly warmly received and the lead actor, Léo Paul Salmain, took home the FIPA D'OR grand prize for best actor.¹² In February, Schlöndorff garnered the "Prix du meilleur réalisateur" of the Audio-Visual Festival de Luchon 2012.¹³ The audience at the "Panorama" section of the Berlinale gave an additional positive applause several weeks later. The response to the festival screening in the German-language press and blogosphere, while generally positive, ran a complete gamut of diverse opinions. "Schlöndorff's little masterpiece," Gundolf Freyermuth wrote in *Filmdienst*, "... provides an example for European cinematic art, European aesthetics."¹⁴ "It perhaps turned into Schlöndorff's best film," Marc Hairapetian seconded on line in "The Spirit meets Volker Schlöndorff."¹⁵ By contrast, NZZ Online states that "one would have expected more thoughtfulness... from Schlöndorff."¹⁶

Early Anglo-American reception was also ambivalent.¹⁷ The most frequent objections responded to what was perceived as the lack of character development¹⁸ and a tendency toward sentimentality.¹⁹ One might defend Schlöndorff on the first charge with the argument that no one seriously criticizes Eisenstein's *Potemkin* for lack of psychological depth and Schlöndorff's film, like Eisenstein's, champions a collective hero. Similarly, to criticize Melville's enigmatic gangsters for lack of rounded characterization would be to miss the point of the director's lean, allusive style. Indeed, the psychological fullness these critics call for may involve exactly the kind of white-elephant overemphasis that the director has so carefully avoided. Schlöndorff knows that meaning can be created as much through concealment as through display. *Calm at Sea* presents a fluid series of pointillist portraits that together take shape into a narrative mural that honors fallen heroes.

The director chooses a narrative structure that emphasizes flow rather than dramatic peaks—a cinematic structure rather than a theatrical one. This musicality becomes particularly evident in the filmmaker's use of sound, especially at the end of the story. Throughout *Calm at Sea* Schlöndorff uses gentle sound overlaps to permit one scene to glide into the next. We see this especially in the scene where the assassins uncover an abandoned wine cellar. They open a bottle of 1934 Riesling and begin to listen to a broadcast of Charles de Gaulle addressing the people of France. There is a cut to the imprisoned partisans listening in their barrack to the same broadcast. Without excessive emphasis the words of the leader unite the two groups of resisters.

The most emphatic use of sound occurs when we hear the words the condemned men have written to their loved ones. As the camera slides among the letter-writers, we hear fragments

of their letters home. The messages are simple and in cases even banal, but Schlöndorff has orchestrated them into an ensemble that gives each instrument a momentary phrase that unites into a single hymn. This sequence in particular has provoked some of the accusations of sentimentality. It may be up to the listener to distinguish between genuine feeling and manipulative bathos.

This striving for emotional resonance is typical of the characteristically middlebrow, so-called quality television movie. Too often inspiring emotions can be mistaken for thematic depth. *Calm at Sea*, however, distinguishes its emotions from the conventional Hallmark Hall of Fame uplift through its rigor of construction, its engagement with abstract ideas about commitment and responsibility and its ability to look for common ground between ideologies that seem at first glance contradictory.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo* where the eponymous scientist guides Andrea Sarti or Brecht's Bacon who, in the almanach tale [Kalandergeschichte] "The Experiment," passes on his knowledge to the stable boy Dick. Such didactic relationships need not necessarily be as intergenerational as they are here.
- 2 Hans-Bernhard Moeller and George Lellis, "Heroes without Compromise: An Interview with Volker Schlöndorff." *Journal of Film and Video* 58 (Fall 2006) p.52.
- 3 Cf. Volker Schlöndorff. *Licht, Schatten und Bewegung*. München: Hanser, 2008. 39-45.
- 4 "Volker Schlöndorff about his new film." English-language press kit to *La Mer à l'aube*. Berlinale n.d., p. 3.
- 5 Cf. V.Schlöndorff, "Nachwort." *Der Unhold*, nach dem Roman *Der Erlkönig* von Michel Tournier, mit Auszügen aus dem Drehbuch. Göttingen: Steidl, 1996. 194.
- 6 "Volker Schlöndorf [sic] depicts Guy Môquet." *21stcenturymanifesto* [blog] <http://21stcenturymanifesto.wordpress.com/2012/02/16/voler-schlondorf-depicts-guy-moquet/>.
- 7 "Calm at Sea BIFF Press Conference," Segment IX. www.traileraddict.com/trailer/calm-at-sea/biff-press-conference-ix.
- 8 Ulrich Matthes, "Attentat und Kaffeehaus." Interview with Kira Taszman. *Neues Deutschland* 28.2. 2012. Dossier 62.Berlinale. Online: www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/218248.attentat-und-kaffeehaus.html?str=sarkozy.
- 9 "Louis Morin, Priest." www.imdb.com/title/tt0055082/fullcredits.
- 10 Cf. Hans-Bernhard Moeller, "Krieg, Kultur, Kollaboration and Konflikt," to be published in *Colloquia Germanica*.
- 11 "Calm at Sea BIFF Press Conference," Segment IX. www.traileraddict.com/trailer/calm-at-sea/biff-press-conference-ix.
- 12 Awards List, FIPA. www.fipa.tm.fr/en/fipa/2012/jury-and-awards-one-off-drama.htm.
- 13 "Le Festival de Luchon 2012: Le palmarès complet," *Première*, February 11, 2012. <http://tele.premiere.fr/News-Tele/Le-Festival-de-Luchon-2012-Le-palmares-complet-3114324>. Cf. also "Succès d'audience pour 'La-mer-à-l'aube de Volker Schlondorff,'" Arte, <http://pro.arte.tv/2012/03/succes-d'audience-pour-la-mer-a-l'aube-de-volker-schlondorff/>.
- 14 *Filmdienst Portal* March 24, 2012. <http://film-dienst.kim-info.de/artikel/ph>.
- 15 "Bei der Filmförderung bin ich abgeblitzt." Interview with Marc Hairapetian. [Web-Magazine] http://spirit-fanzine.com/interviews/texte/Volker_Schloendorff.html.
- 16 "Auf Wiedersehen, Kind. V. Schl.'s *Das Meer am Morgen*." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung Online*. www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/kultur/film/auf-wiedersehen-kind-1.15178414.html.
- 17 Neil Young, "Calm at Sea: Berlin Film Review." *The Hollywood Reporter*. Feb. 22, 2012. On line: www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/calm-at-sea-berlin-review-293915. p. 2 of 4.
- 18 Lida Bach, "Das Meer am Morgen," criticizes "drawing table/Reißbrett-Charaktere." [blog] <http://kino-zeit.de/blog/berlinale/dad-meer-am-morgen>, p. 2 of 4.
- 19 Guy Lodge, "Calm at Sea." *Variety* Feb.16, 2012. Also on line:

Suffer the Children

By ROBERT CARDULLO

Most of the best films about children are about boys: *Shoeshine* (1946), *Germany, Year Zero* (1947), and *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), for instance. Moreover, most of the best films about children were made by Italian neorealists, as well as by directors following their socially as well as politically realistic example, from Luis Buñuel with *Los Olvidados* (1951) and René Clément with *Forbidden Games* (1952), to Hector Babenco's *Pixote* (1981), Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), Gianni Amelio's *Stolen Children* (1992), Samira Makhmalba's *The Apple* (1998), and Bertrand Tavernier's *It All Started Here* (1999). Now we can add a Russian to this list of Latin Americans, Frenchmen, Italians, Indians, and Iranians, makers all of "children's films." His name is Andrei Kravchuk, and his film is called *The Italian* (2005), in seeming homage to neorealism's country of origin. (Kravchuk was preceded in this style and genre by at least one fellow Russian, Vitali Kanevsky, with his 1989 film *Freeze. Die. Come to Life.*)

One of the questions that attends *The Italian* and the rest of the above-named films is less *why* they are about children (that's easy: often one can see a war-torn, religiously-divided, or economically-distressed society more clearly, more freshly, through the eyes of its youngest members) than *how* those children gave the performances they did. For, however lovely among film's powers its relationship to children may be (not children in the audience but those on screen), that relationship is also quizzical. Certainly something about performing before a camera stimulates a child's natural instinct to pretend. But all children play and pretend in one way or another; the real wonder is how, without knowledge and often without ambition, a child will behave on a movie set like a pro, in every sense of that word. I'm not necessarily talking here about those children whose parents want them to become film stars, because an extraordinary performance can come from a child without any subsequent career, such as the little girl in Jean Benoît-Lévy's *La Maternelle* (1932). The viewer is left wondering whether such a child remembers, later in life, that she had once moved thousands—in fact, still moves them.

And what about Kolya Spiridonov? This boy, who was nine or ten at the time *The Italian* was made, plays a six-year-old (named Vanya Solntsev) in the film's leading role, its mainstay part. Spiridonov had already been acting for two years prior to this one, in several pictures that never made it to the United States. Still, with his pale blond hair, scrawny frame, and wide but tired, cautious eyes, there is no child-star quality about him.

How did he create the thoughtful, oddly private performance that he gives in *The Italian*? As his director, Kravchuk probably wooed Spiridonov and won his confidence, but can that really account for the relative depth of this child's acting? Why did he want to do it well? Pleasing his director and his parents, being praised and having his ego massaged, yes, but where did he find the sheer understanding to play the part, and did he even realize that he had found it? It seems fitting to fantasize that the camera speaks a secret, attractive language to certain children who comprehend it and respond. If so, this is a conversation that the camera and the child can, and will, forever keep secret from all the grownups around.

Let's start with grownup number one in this case, Andrei Kravchuk. *The Italian* is his first solo feature: in 2000, he co-directed *A Christmas Mystery* (unseen by me), and he has also directed a few documentaries, made several short films, and done some work for television. One of Kravchuk's documentaries was about his teacher at the St. Petersburg Institute of Film and Television, Semen Aranovich (1934-1996), himself a documentary filmmaker who infused his feature films with authentic, documentary-like detail. (As we can see from *Summer Trip to the Seaside* [1978], where he recruited actors from juvenile correctional institutions or foster-care facilities in order to render more accurately his characters' harsh childhood experiences during the early years of World War II.)

What marks Kravchuk as a latter-day neorealist (also as a documentarian-become-fiction filmmaker) is that (1) he and his scenarist, Andrei Romanov, got the idea for *The Italian* from a newspaper article (the origin, as well, of a number of scripts by the best known of Italian neorealist screenwriters, Cesare Zavattini) about an orphan who learned to read and write so that he could find his biological mother; (2) Kravchuk observed children at real orphanages, and then, after deciding to shoot his film on location at the state-run Lesogorsky Children's Home near St. Petersburg (the director's own home town), he cast several of this institution's children in featured roles; and (3) despite shooting in color, Kravchuk and his cinematographer, Alexander Burov (who has also done exceptional work for the director Alexander Sokurov), use grainy or gritty, black-and-gray-dominated visuals to keep *The Italian* well this side of arrant tear-jerking.

The Italian begins with a striking image: a group of young children emerge like phantoms from the mist hovering over a



bleak Russian bog, then proceed to push an SUV run short of gas to its destination—the crumbing orphanage where much of the film takes place, a children's home that is a lingering relic of the Soviet past, now lost amid the snow-covered expanses of Russia's vast northwest. A nearby highway bustles with commercial vehicles from an entirely different, profit-driven era of free-market enterprise as well as social mobility; and in this particular backwater, the truck drivers slow down only to satisfy their carnal appetites. Excluded from the "brave new world" epitomized by this well-maintained, cost-effective road, the orphanage's neglected and poorly educated charges survive in the only way they know how: by servicing the privileged highway population as prostitutes and car-washers. In other words, these children are wards of the state in name only.

The orphanage is run by the Headmaster (played by Yuri Itskov), a broken-down man who, in spite of being occasionally drunk, periodically unkempt, and frequently flustered, does the best he can, with limited resources, for the many youngsters abandoned by their parents to his care. The Headmaster notwithstanding, however, the real rulers of the orphanage are found in a group of older orphaned boys whose own leader is Kolyan (Denis Moiseenko). He and his gang operate out of a basement boiler room, where they run a variety of schemes from theft to pimping in order to get by.

Though we sometimes see younger kids punched and intimi-

dated by these older boys, it's quite clear that none of this is done arbitrarily or out of cruelty. Instead, the boys are enforcing a code of conduct that demands honesty and the sharing of assets, all for the good of the group; treated as an equal despite his age, six-year-old Vanya himself contributes money to the group out of the tips he earns washing cars at a local gas station. Ironically, then, socialism is still alive and well in Russia—at least among children at the very bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, who have neither mothers nor fathers to look out for them but who have something comparable in their "brotherhood" of orphans. (It must be said, however, that there is always corruption at the top, and in this socialistic "state," it resides in Kolyan, who keeps a stash of money for himself and eventually uses it to purchase a motorcycle—an important asset giving him access to the superhighway of capitalism.)

The brightest moments in the lives of these bedraggled and lonely youngsters come when "Madam" shows up with well-heeled foreign couples who want to adopt a child. A wily and formidable woman with a portly and controlling presence (as played by Maria Kuznetsova, who acted the roles of Catherine the Great in Sukurov's *Russian Ark* [2002] and Lenin's wife in the same director's *Taurus* [2001]), she is the only frequent visitor from outside the confined space of the orphanage. Madam is also a ruthless capitalist entrepreneur, an illegal baby-broker who makes a comfortable living by selling

orphaned children for adoption abroad. She thus regards every such international adoption as a financial transaction to be carried out exclusively for profit. In this business she not only has the pliable Headmaster firmly under her thumb, Madam is closely connected to the local authorities as well, who are more than happy (for a price) to help her satisfy the needs of—and navigate the Byzantine Russian courts for—wealthy Westerners in search of a child.

Two of those Westerners are Claudia and Roberto, an amiable Italian couple (the inhabitants of the stalled vehicle from the film's opening) who have come to Russia to look for a child to adopt, and whom Madam duly escorts to the provincial orphanage. Out of all the youngsters offered, they choose Vanya, and we feel we would do the same: tough-skinned but vulnerable, full of spunk yet deeply sensitive, matter-of-factly confident and self-aware at the same time as he is charmingly naïve (with his best friend, Anton [Dima Zemlyanko], he seriously discusses foreigners' buying up of Russian children for "spare parts"), Vanya is irresistible as, dressed in his best clothes and with both fear and anticipation on his face, he introduces himself to the Italians. They quickly settle the issue of money with Madam, but because of legal procedures and bureaucratic paperwork, it will be two months before the couple can take the boy home. The film takes place in those two months, during which all the other waifs in the asylum call Vanya "the Italian." These other orphans, jealous but resigned, consider him lucky to have been chosen for adoption, and so does Vanya—at first.

A few days later, though, a distraught woman (Darya Lesnikova) comes to the orphanage looking for her son, whom she had abandoned at birth and whom she is now desperate to reclaim. But she is told that the boy she is looking for, who was Vanya's friend Mukhin, has recently been adopted by a European couple. Mukhin's biological mother then leaves in despair despite Vanya's attempts to comfort her; the next day, word reaches the orphanage that this guilt-ridden woman committed suicide by throwing herself under a train.

Now Vanya is not so sure about beginning a new life in another country with the Italian couple. Suddenly he has questions about who he is, who his mother is, and he knows he will never be able to find out after he leaves the orphan asylum. What if his own mother should happen to come looking for him, he asks himself? How would she ever find him if he has moved away to Italy? What then? In a second, Vanya has seen answered, with a dash of hope, the question that underpins any orphan's existence. "Why was I rejected?" (We are never told why Vanya's own mother gave him up, because her "psychology" or morality is not the issue here.) Sometimes the answer is that it was all just a mistake, and real parents do return.

Or they are found. And, despite the heartfelt, searingly honest attempts on the part of the other kids to convince the boy that birth mothers don't usually try to find the children they've abandoned (and even if they did, the kids, say, who would want to be with someone who had already deserted him once?), Vanya decides that he has to find his mother even if it means losing the Italian family. In order to find out where she is, however, he needs access to confidential records stored in the Headmaster's office; but he can't read, and the older kids won't help him until he can read his file for himself. Vanya therefore convinces Irka (Olga Shuvalova), a feisty teenaged orphan who earns money as a prostitute, to teach him. Then, with the help of some of the boys, he retrieves his personal file one night after

the Headmaster has passed out from drunkenness.

From it he learns the name of the foster home for newborns, in a far-off city, where he spent his first few months. But that's all Vanya learns, and to discover more he will have to embark on a journey to that foster home. Again with the aid of Irka, he is enabled to do so: she buys him a train ticket (taking the money from Kolyan's stash) and he flees the orphanage just days before the Italian couple is to get custody of him—to become a Dickensian waif, out on the road in the strange, novel world of the twenty-first century. (Speaking of Dickensian waifs, *Oliver Twist* was filmed yet again—this time by Roman Polanski, of all people—in the same year *The Italian* was made: 2005.)

The remainder of this ninety-nine-minute film documents Vanya's search for his origins and ultimately his, and in a sense his country's, identity, as he traverses the hostile Russian terrain (with its perpetual wintry gloom of snow and ice and rain) and navigates through the various generational and social layers of what has become a deeply split society. During his trip by train, by bus, and then on foot, Vanya encounters kindness and sympathy, treachery and duplicity (being beaten and robbed at one point), but he remains unwaveringly focused on the goal of meeting his mother. He's not desperate or over-emotional in his quest, just determined and smart, persistent and resourceful—making full use of the wiles he has learned in six years of state confinement. Vanya especially needs those wiles (blending into crowds, hiding out, and even outrunning his pursuers) because, together with her mercenary driver-cum-bodyguard, Grigori (Nikolai Reutov), the fuming-mad Madam is in hot pursuit of him and the (potentially lost) income he represents. Not only do these two travel by automobile, but the automobile is an expensive Range Rover, bought from Madam's illicit child-adoption fees to replace her otherwise top-of-the-line, but Soviet-made, Volga.

Finally, Vanya reaches the foster home of his infancy, where he learns the address of his mother from the welcoming night-time supervisor (Rudolf Kuld), a World War II veteran of simple dignity and uncommon selflessness. She lives at apartment 3, 25 October Street (ironically, October 25th was the starting date of the 1917 Russian Revolution according to the Julian Calendar in use in Russia at the time [for the rest of the world, the date was November 7th]), the night supervisor reveals, and he further promises to adopt Vanya himself if the boy does not find or reunite with his mother in the end. He *does* locate her domicile, though not before a run-in on the street, in the rain, with Grigori, who, in a dramatic conversion worthy of Dickens (like much of this tale itself), turns from a pitiless bounty hunter into Vanya's compassionate ally—simply by letting the young fugitive go.

And go he does: right to the apartment where his mother lives. Before ringing the bell, he carefully smooths down his hair and straightens his clothes, in a moment of calm self-possession that recalls the rich inner lives of working-class people living out their existences under the watchful eye of the Dardenne brothers (in such films as *L'Enfant* [2005] and *The Son* [2002]). Previously unsmiling, Vanya now smiles, in close-up, and the up-to-now spare, even timid, notes of Alexander Kneiffel's ethereal score (which has relied mainly on the plink of piano keys, as if a child were trying to pick out a lullaby) swell to flood the soundtrack. But Kravchuk and Romanov abruptly end *The Italian* here, with a fade-out to a blank white screen, as Vanya narrates in voice-over a letter to his friend Anton, who was

adopted by the Italian couple in his place.

To wit: we never see the boy's mother, let alone any reunion of this woman with her son. So we get no answers to the questions, "Has Vanya found his birth mother? If so, does she welcome her son with open arms or turn her back on him once again, turning him out into the street and sending him away?" The real question then becomes, of course, why does the film end in this way, denying us the emotional fulfillment of its own concluding, sentimental, even pathetic terms (unlike Valery Akhakov's *The Greenhouse* [2005], with its similar theme)? Is this ending a cheap trick, or is it part and parcel of *The Italian's* overall artistic design—the design, that is, less of a heart-warming family movie (you can find that in the similarly-themed Brazilian movie *Central Station* [1998] and the Czech *Kolya* [1996]) or a Russian after-school special, than of a probing social-realist film that raises more issues that it resolves? Its numerous prizes—the "Cinekid Award," top honors at the "International Young Audience Film Festival," the "Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk Grand Prix" at the Berlin Festival—not to speak of its being nominated for Best Foreign-Language Film at the 78th Academy Awards, suggest the former genre. I think *The Italian* is the latter: a work that has popular ingredients, to be sure, but one that uses them, when all is said and done, to serious artistic ends.

Those ends naturally include the whole issue, or business, of the adoption of Russian orphans by foreigners. But Kravchuk and Romanov are less interested in indicting the parents who abandon these children, the state that warehouses them, or even the ultra-nationalists who would rather see such youngsters spend their first eighteen years in a Russian asylum rather than be brought up, as part of a family, in a foreign country. For a social exposé of the melodramatic kind *The Italian* is not. It is, however, a political allegory at the same time as, on the surface, it is a kind of domestic drama that finally takes the form of a road film.

The first clue to the film's "deep structure" is its titular character's last name, Sointsev (close to the Russian word for "sun," *solntse*), which Vanya shares with the eponymous child protagonist of Valentin Kataev's 1944 socialist-realist novella *The Son of the Regiment*—this son being a wartime orphan adopted by the army and raised in an elite military school. Vanya's last name is thus doubly symbolic: not only of the ultimately failed Soviet social experiment, but also of the "sunny" future that might have awaited him, away from the frigid climes and dim prospects of his motherland, in Italy. The second clue to *The Italian's* subtext is the name of the gang leader at the orphanage, Kolyan, which phonetically resembles the name of the character Tolyan from Pavel Chukhray's film *The Thief* (1997), even as the authoritarian behaviors of these two figures mirror each other.

What these clues suggest is that *The Italian* is scrutinizing and consequently rejecting several successive models of social organization, as its naïve child protagonist bypasses the mistakes and inadequacies of the past to arrive at his own, post-*glasnost* ideal of human commonality. Those models include both the "new capitalism" of the economically exploitative Kolyan and the "utopian socialism" of the classless, motherless, and fatherless (if not stateless) brotherhood of orphans, as well as the "old totalitarianism" of the mercilessly domineering Madam. Madam's previous ownership of a Volga, for example—the Soviet car once accessible almost exclusively to Brezhnev-era political and cultural elites—traces her lineage back to the Communist *nomenklatura*. So do her methods of

achieving her goals: her threats not only to lock up the willful, non-compliant Vanya in isolation, but also to send him to a home for the mentally retarded, followed by assignment to a labor camp, recall Soviet-era psychiatric abuses against political and intellectual dissidents. Madam is thus little more than the cynical, selfish functionary of a corrupt former regime—yet one clever enough to continue exploiting her country and her people up to the present in the guise of a free-market entrepreneur.

In this scheme, where does Grigori, Madam's chauffeur and bodyguard, fit? In a sense, with Kolyan and Madam herself, he completes *The Italian's* new-capitalist triad. In the age bracket between his boss and the orphanage gang-leader, Grigori represents the *glasnost*-era generation that succumbed, under pressure from its "superiors," to the former Soviet elites' immoral re-appropriation of power and wealth. An obedient executor of Madam's orders throughout the movie, Grigori suddenly, and seemingly implausibly, changes his ways when he disobeys Madam by not returning Vanya to her custody. But Grigori's change of heart is not so implausible from the perspective of the film's political allegory. For that change, or conversion, appears to imply that his generation's squandered aspirations toward political morality, social justice, and—perhaps above all—personal responsibility are ultimately recoverable, and may even constitute the foundation of the ideal living arrangement sought by the child protagonist of *The Italian*.

That ideal living arrangement is not to be found in a children's home, and, apart from the obvious reasons for this, the patriarchal heads of both the Petersburg orphanage and Vanya's original foster home reveal why. Certainly neither is a bad man, as I've already made clear, but each is identified with his particular generation in such a way that he becomes part of the film's problem, as opposed to its solution. The Headmaster, for example—a disillusioned 1960s dreamer who ascribes his failure to become an elite fighter pilot, *à la* Yuri Gagarin, to the absence of a benevolent mentor by his side—may be uncomfortable with Madam's strong-armed tactics, but he himself delivers such an abusive tirade against the dejected young woman who comes to recover her child that he inadvertently causes her suicide.

The nighttime supervisor, for his part, also indiscriminately condemns mothers who choose to abandon their children at birth, for in his authoritarian model of self-sacrifice and civic duty—doubtless derived from his wartime service—there is no place for individual fulfillment, personal motivation, or self-justification. The supervisor's "collectivist" point of view is subtly suggested not only by the street on which his foster home is located ("Frunze," from the name of Mikhail Vasilevich Frunze [1885-1925], the "father" and ideologue of the Red Army) and his brand of cigarettes ("Belomorkanal," introduced in 1932 to commemorate the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal [abbreviated as *Belomorkanal*], which was the site of one of Stalin's first "re-education through labor" projects). It is also suggested by his surprise at learning that "Sointsev" is, in fact, Vanya's actual last name, the one he inherited from his biological mother—and not, like many a parentless newborn named by a doctor or a nurse, from a real or fictional Soviet war hero. (We, or literary types in general, may know that "Sointsev" derives from the last name of the protagonist of Kataev's novel, but Vanya's mother would not know and therefore obviously did not take her and her son's surname from this character.)

Vanya, of course, is not surprised at the origin of his last name. For he is a naif in the best sense: a person with an inher-

ent faith not only in the concept of family, but also in people generally; with a genuine capacity for love, compassion, and forgiveness; and, most importantly, with a sense of personal responsibility both for his own life and that of the human being (genetically) closest to him: his mother. Refusing to play into the latter-day nostalgia for Soviet state-ism or the contemporary Russian infatuation with unrestricted market capitalism, Kravchuk and Romanov hold up Vanya's instinctive belief system as the ideal model of social action. Vanya *takes charge* of his and his mother's lives, that is to say, thereby challenging the commonly held conviction about the ineffectualness of individual action in Russia, eloquently if fatalistically summed up in the phrase "*ot nas nichego ne zavisi*" ("nothing depends on us"). And, through the courageous example of Vanya Sointsev, *The Italian* admonishes its predominantly adult audiences in its native Russia to start taking responsibility for their own future—one that is clearly inseparable from the welfare of Russia's children.

The film locates the model community, then, in the nuclear family, representing it as the basic cell, or logical framework, from which to build a civil society in a truly democratic Russia. Will Vanya and his birth mother reunite and achieve that community at the end of *The Italian*? The "warmth" of their surname implies that they are destined to come together, whereas the "coldness" of the film's final image—a blank white screen—suggests the very opposite. (Similarly, the narrative point of view the filmmakers adopt—that of the six-year-old protagonist—conflicts with their almost always photographing him from above [instead of from a ground- or eye-level perspective], in high-angle shots that make this little boy seem even littler and less able than he is.)

In other words, Vanya's dreams of a sunny Motherland clash with the reality of the wintry Madam-culture he continues to inhabit. That is *the truth* of *The Italian*'s otherwise abrupt conclusion, an allegorical truth that extends to all of Russia's orphans. If you want emotional or cathartic closure, you'll have to find it somewhere else. And if you want to know what happened in the end to the real-life orphan whose story inspired Vanya's, read the Russian newspapers.

Along with the name Andrei Kravchuk, remember the name Bahman Ghobadi, the director of the "children's film" *Turtles Can Fly* (2004). As I watched this picture, I thought of two of its cinematic relatives, each of which shall frame my discussion of *Turtles Can Fly*. The first, as in the case of *The Italian*, is neorealism, and in particular Roberto Rossellini's neorealist film *Germany, Year Zero* (1947), in which a twelve-year-old boy, trying to feed his family amidst the destitution of occupied Berlin, poisons his sickly father (played by the only professional in the cast, Franz Kruger) to lessen the burden. Unable to live with the deed, however, he throws himself from the ruins of a tall building—but not before poignantly finding a moment to play (yes, play, not pray) before killing himself.

The second work I recalled, as I screened *Turtles Can Fly*, is the "new" neorealist *West Beirut* (1998), a film by Ziad Doueiri about two Muslim boys and a Christian girl (all played by young people who had never before acted) growing up in the war-torn Lebanon of 1975. Here they manage to tease, quarrel, idle, snack, and bicycle like their youthful counterparts everywhere, at the same time as they take risks—amidst bombed-out buildings, rubble-strewn streets, military checkpoints, and frequent sniper fire—that even the most intrepid of schoolchildren would have trouble imagining.

In connection with Ghobadi's movie, I also thought of the current Iranian cinema, what could be called the larger "picture" of which *Turtles Can Fly* is a part—a larger picture itself framed by such films around, or outside, it as the classic *Germany, Year Zero* and the contemporaneous *West Beirut*. For Ghobadi was born in Iranian Kurdistan and received his film education in Tehran, where, along with other experience, he was an assistant director for Abbas Kiarostami on *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) and acted in Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (2000). Indeed, the threads that link many Iranian films may be found in Ghobadi's cinema as well. These pictures often focus, for example, on ordinary people caught in harsh circumstances brought about by sociopolitical, cultural, or natural forces. The devastation created by an earthquake, the wounds and traumas caused by war, the hardships heaped on the poor—these are powerful subjects. And such films manage to address them not with easy sloganizing or smooth sentimentality, but with both penetrating insight and a strong feeling of compassion for those who suffer.

Formally as well as narratively, moreover, Iranian moviemakers, like the Kurdish Ghobadi, have shown a genius for making virtues out of constraints. Since their films are cheaply made, they often have a surface simplicity that belies their subtle realism. And the fact that Western-style obscenity and sex are prohibited has meant not only that directors practice skillfully indirect, sometimes allegorical storytelling, but also that they search for subjects which go beyond the formulaic or the genre-specific. The Iranian specialty of films about children, for instance, is also a specialty of films not necessarily made for children, and this type of picture allows both for a form of oblique social commentary and for the depiction of intimacy—each of which would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve with adult characters in censorship-burdened Iran. (Here is just a sampling of such Iranian "children's films": *The Runner* [1984], *Where Is the Friend's House?* [1987], *Children of Divorce* [1990], *The Jar* [1992], *The White Balloon* [1995], *The Mirror* [1997], *The Children of Heaven* [1997], *The Apple* [1998], and *The Color of Paradise* [1999].)

Bahman Ghobadi well knows about the relationship of children to film censorship in his part of the world, given the fact that he has taken up this Iranian—now Kurdish—specialty in at least two of his features to date. Since Ghobadi is a Kurd, he is one of a people who are, in a sense, stateless, because they live in a number of Middle Eastern states. Their nation of Kurdistan is apparently an entity to Kurds, however—if not always to the several countries across which it stretches (among them Turkey, Iraq, and Iran). And Ghobadi's *Turtles Can Fly* is his fourth film about Kurds that I know, as well as his third of five full-length films (on all of which he has served as both director and screenwriter). The other pictures of his about Kurds are *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), *Marooned in Iraq* (2002), and *Half Moon* (2006), the middle one of which, like *Turtles Can Fly*, also deals with a group of orphaned children trying to survive in extreme circumstances.

A Time for Drunken Horses deals a bit more heavily, though, with its family of young people trying to eke out an existence at the same time that they try to raise money for an operation to save their dying brother. There's no such heaviness or italicized sentiment in *Turtles Can Fly*, which is masterly as it courses before us with grace, control, love—and anger. The terrain is the barren, rocky hill country of northern Iraq near the Turkish border (which is fenced with barbed wire and guarded by



machine guns). The time is a few weeks before the American invasion of 2003. The specific place is a refugee village of tents, in the midst of a brown landscape topped by an ice-blue sky and littered with the ruins of houses. (The ruins are not identified, but they may be leftovers from the Iran-Iraq war, which ended in 1988.)

The three leading characters of *Turtles Can Fly* are in their early teens: a smart operator nicknamed Satellite; a youth called Henkov, who lost both his arms in a mine explosion; and Henkov's sister, Agrin, gentle but desperately resigned to the grayness of her existence. They are joined by Pasheo, Satellite's nimble lieutenant, who, even though he has a crippled foot, runs around on crutches like an antelope; and by Rega, Agrin's three-year-old son (whom the armless Henkov sometimes carries—with the little boy's arms around his neck) and the product of her gang rape by soldiers of Saddam Hussein. The narrative has two main elements: Satellite's romantic interest in Agrin; and his efforts, along with the ragtag army of children (orphaned by the ethnic genocide or "cleansing" Saddam Hussein perpetrated against the Iraqi Kurds) this natural leader

commandeers, to earn income in *dinars* or dollars from the excavation of unexploded "anti-personnel" mines, planted like seeds in the fields all around them—which he then sells to Kurdish middlemen, who, in turn, sell them for profit to the United Nations.

Accidents inevitably occur, as the legions of the scarred and disfigured in this film attest (even the resourceful Satellite is not immune). Throughout, the land mines are ironically called "American," because Americans sold many of them to Saddam Hussein, who swamped northeastern (Kurdish) Iraq with the mines rather than use them against Iran, as intended. Yet the Kurdish adults we see—pompously ineffective or hopelessly lost—are awaiting the American invasion eagerly, as a possible correction to or improvement of a condition that includes no electricity, no running water, and no schools. Hence the reason why the elders engage Satellite: they need a satellite dish for their village's community television if they are to keep up with news of the impending war, and Satellite got his nickname for his expertise in procuring dishes from the black market. (He installs them as well, for a price.) Indeed, one of the few humor-

ous moments in *Turtles Can Fly* derives from Satellite's handiwork: a village elder turns his head away when the young entrepreneur puts on a "prohibited channel" that shows a long-haired rock musician in concert.

Mostly the film's texture (and loosely textured it is more than tightly plotted) is composed of grim details, but Ghobadi embraces a range of feelings—proud, amorous, and terrible in addition to humorous—that swirl through these youngsters' lives. Moreover, he has an eye both for intimacy—the affection, the eating, the quarreling—and for vista. An example of the latter: at times, huge swarms of villagers, at times only children, flow over the hills in panoramic breath, so as to suggest that these two groups live in vastly different figurative worlds despite the fact that they both literally occupy the same vast, harsh, and forbidding place. Ghobadi is helped here by Shahriar Assadi's cinematography, which is acutely placed in the chromatic spectrum. For its effect is of black and white, with only occasional hints of color—for instance, dim red stripes on Satellite's T-shirt. The overall visual impression of such imagery is that these characters, these people, live in the grainy, pallid, continuous present, occasionally touched by a variegated glimpse of an even worse past (the lurid sexual assault of Agrin, in a quick flashback) or a potentially better future (the arrival of the American colors at the end).

Satellite, for his part, is irresistibly optimistic about that future, as his appearance reveals: showing fuzz on his upper lip, wearing a pair of large-framed glasses, and sporting jeans, floppy sweat shirt, and a reversed (fatigue-issue) baseball cap, he rides a souped-up, colorfully adorned bicycle down muddy roads as he tends to his assorted money-making schemes. Henkov himself claims the power to see into the future in intermittent visions that are reliable compared to the inanities uttered by CNN's disembodied but endlessly talking heads. The very title of this film is a reference to one of the visions he shares with Satellite: that some day these Kurdish villagers will live in normal housing, free from tyranny of all kinds in their own private utopia, where even turtles can fly. If such a prophecy seems anachronistic, contrived, or fanciful to you as you read this, remember that the reality Ghobadi is depicting is so bizarre that, in its midst, a mystical oracle like Henkov turns out to be not so unlikely a thing. Is it, or he, any more implausible, after all, than a world where infants can toddle through mine-fields and red-colored fish swim at the bottom of sinkholes; where children treat their toothaches with kerosene, use gas masks as toys, and live in abandoned tanks near borders dotted with guard towers?

Whatever her brother Henkov's clairvoyance about the future, Agrin will have none of it: her world is unrelievedly bleak and her otherwise beautiful face meets it only with a vacant stare. From the opening shots of *Turtles Can Fly*, in one of which she leaps precariously from a rock, Ghobadi makes no secret of Agrin's ultimate fate. Understandably fearful of men in general, she has repeatedly discouraged the friendly advances of Satellite at the same time as she has wanted to abandon or destroy Rega, the man-child she love-hates so intensely. And, in the end, this ineffably sad young woman sadly capitulates to her *dual* fate: after killing her son by tying him to a rock and dropping him into a pond, she commits suicide by jumping off a cliff. Henkov finds her shoes on the cliff's edge, picks them up with his mouth, and simply walks off. Later a little kid presents Satellite with an arm from a Saddam statue (for which these street urchins paid a pretty price), as clean-uniformed, well-

equipped, and well-fed American troops march into the area. But now Satellite is no longer sure of his optimism, let alone the American kind, with its promise of liberation, independence, and material welfare. So, as *Turtles Can Fly* concludes, its central character turns his back on the United States Army and, moving screen-left, quietly exits the frame.

Even as a film released in the same year, the Japanese *Nobody Knows* (2004), presented child abandonment from the point of view of the children abandoned, *Turtles Can Fly* presents war from the point of view, not of its perpetrators, but of its most vulnerable victims: children. They may appear to have the least power over their destinies, but here the poignancy is in the human control that characters like Satellite, Henkov, and Pasheo do exercise, as well as in the deadly decisiveness displayed by someone such as Agrin. Humanity survives in the surviving children at the end—or let us say that the *courage* to survive lives on—but at what price? This is the question we are left asking, such that *Turtles Can Fly* becomes a highly political film without turning into a politicized one that takes sides for or against any nation-state, even an aspiring one like Kurdistan. "Support our troops" might be the dictate of the conservative American patriot, then, but "suffer the children" is the mantra of this grittily primitive yet highly sophisticated Kurdish work of art.

Save for Ghobadi's films, however, there isn't much of a Kurdish cinema (only the additional names of the directors Hiner Saleem and Jano Rosebiani come to mind)—certainly not in the organized sense of an "industry," perish the word. Hence low budgets (Ghobadi himself has produced or co-produced all of his pictures) and non-professional actors are the order of the day. But what wonders this director, like others before him and concurrent with him, works with his novices!—all of them non- or first-time actors, not merely non-professionals (which implies previous acting work as an amateur), and all the main ones children. The most disturbing yet admirable instance is the armless boy Henkov, who is played by Hiresh Feysal Rahman with flawless intensity, and about whose armlessness there can be no fakery (in a movie, happily, that cannot afford digital effects): we see the stumps. Avaz Latif is irretrievably distraught as Agrin, Henkov's sister, whom Latif makes compelling despite the more or less monochromatic nature of her character. And Soran Ebrahim has all the flash, wit, and energy, together with tacit depth, that Satellite requires. The dialogue these characters speak is mostly in Kurdish, with touches of Arabic and occasional dabs of English picked up from television—especially by Satellite, who, not without some justice, nonsensically translates any and all news as "It will rain tomorrow: this is a code."

In any case, "Kurd" or "Kurdistan" is no longer merely a code word for me that conjures up the much-betrayed political entity of Kurdistan—betrayed by Saddam Hussein, who poison-gassed its people (*his* people) in addition to mining their land in a megalomaniacal effort to "purify" Iraq and dominate the region's oil fields; and deserted, to its infinite discredit, by the United States, which broke promises of support for the Kurds when they needed it most: against the forces of American "ally" Saddam Hussein. (I do not have the space here to speak of the Kurds' vexed relationship with the Iranians or, for that matter, of their long and troubled history with the Turks.) Now, when I think of Kurdistan—a name you can't even find on many maps—I will think of its people, its customs, its geography, its children. And I will try to envision the day when Satellite's Kurdistan-of-the-imagination becomes a reality, where Kurds can thrive and even turtles can fly.



TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2012

The Sixties Redux

"Everybody believed that the revolution was around the corner"

Après mai

Free Angela and all Political Prisoners
Loin du Viêtnam

By SCOTT FORSYTH

This year's Festival offered an extraordinary opportunity to cinematically tour the cultural and political landscape of the sixties, legendary decade of mass radicalization and challenge, both to everyday capitalism in the advanced world and to global imperialism everywhere. Those dizzying days of protest, war, violence and debate generated the great ambitions of the new social movements whose achievements so dramatically altered our cultural and social world since that epochal moment. Just as much, our times are marked by the limitations, integration and defeats of those movements. Indeed, the sixties have never really

gone away, mocked and trivialized by the media, still the target for the vituperative condemnation and programmatic backlash of the Right, from Reagan to Sarkozy. But still, as these films, illustrate forcefully, an inspiration for contemporary hopes for rejuvenated radical politics.

Signally, it was the events of May 68 in France that most returned social transformation in the advanced capitalist world as a real political possibility, after the crushing of thirties and forties radicalism in the reactionary quiescence of the Cold War fifties. The outstanding new film by Olivier Assayas is conceived in and suffused with the spirit of 68. *Après mai* (titled innocuously *Something in the Air* in English) is a moving and exciting film, inspired, apparently, autobiographically by Assayas' youthful radical activism. Young Gilles, the stand-in for Assayas, is a high school militant in 1971, still filled with the promise and zeal of May 68, exhilarated by clashes with the police as well as passionate debates, and romantic infatuations,

with comrades. Gilles is a budding artist, his development fuelled as much by spray painting illegal slogans at night as by his own drawing and reading. As a coming of age tale, the film is concerned with the difficult lessons of growing up but very consciously in a particular historical moment. The self-centred, even indulgent, nature of autobiography is contextualized with a convincing portrait of the sixties as cultural and social change and conflict in everything—all the excitement of sex, drugs, rock and roll—and revolution! The details of music, clothes, mores, hair, generational attitudes, gender and sexual politics are all part of the dramatization. There is, of course, an element of nostalgia here, especially for those of us who share a similar political biography. But that nostalgia is given import by the hopeful fusion of history with biography that the grand political epic of the sixties provides for the characters, and we spectators. Assayas tries to make us think historically about the sixties, and by extension, our present,



Loin du Viêt Nam



through the opening eyes of his young self. (Of course, the fantasy that biography will just coincide with history is an especially masculine wish-fulfillment, sardonically noted by one of the characters in Alain Tanner's *Jonah will be 25 in the year 2000*, another great sixties film)

Assayas provided a lengthy lecture/interview for the press at this year's Festival; he is a strikingly intelligent and sophisticated critic of his own work and provided a number of valuable insights. He named Guy Debord, the legendary theorist and activist of the Situationist International - to some, one of the sparks of 68—as a key artistic and intellectual influence. We can see the film's presentation of Gilles and his comrades as enacting a politics of 'events' and counter-spectacle to the dominating and daunting power of the society of the spectacle. But Gilles' journey concludes with a job in the centre of that spectacle, the movie industry, so we cannot avoid finally confronting the allure and power of the prevailing social order. Assayas balances an exuberant sense that the world can be changed - "we always have it in our hands to change the world"—with an astute calibration of what failed in the sixties. On the one hand, he says that "everybody believed that the revolution was

around the corner". That excitement comes through and the sense of a collapse of historical time seems crucial, absurd but plausible all at once, to a belief in radical social transformation. On the other, Assayas has an acute sense that his young characters were in a frightening "social war", with values and possibilities changing and collapsing in uncertain and confusing ways; not all come through safely. That the personal became political can also be dangerous: Assayas said he wanted to show "the turmoil of the world upside-down and the way I survived the seventies."

The film's portrayal of the day to day politics of the sixties and seventies is similarly balanced by what succeeded and what became dead-ends for the Left. We see the central role of Maoist and Trotskyist revolutionary organizations in organizing and continuing the struggle. We also see Gilles developing a critique of sectarian vanguardism and leftist third worldism, as he questions the struggle over correct lines and the fervent adulation of the Cultural Revolution. These political arguments and observations are presented with clarity and sympathy, albeit in a rudimentary form, appropriate to the protagonist's youthful combination of intelligence and naiveté. Similarly, the attraction of political violence as revolutionary hopes wane, and state repression intensifies, is presented as understandable and, just as clearly, futile.

It is, of course, extremely rare to see such political debates presented in a theatrical feature film and Assayas manages to do so intelligence and wit. We even see young Gilles anguishing over the classic leftist debate about the role of art in politics as he participates in a filmmaking collective and cannot help but be bored by sincere third world solidarity documentaries; Gilles, like Assayas, will find his artistic vocation elsewhere: by implication he wants to grow up to make the film we are watching.

Straight from the sixties, *Loin du Vietnam/Far from Vietnam* is a little seen but still famed solidarity documentary. A restored print was presented, dedicated to the revered, recently deceased, Chris Marker. Marker coordinated, edited, and provided the stirring narration for this film, collectively made by key figures of sixties French cinema, including Claude Lelouch, Agnes Varda, Alain Resnais, Michael Klein, Joris Ivens and Jean-Luc Godard. Marker's filmmaking collective,

SLON (Société pour le Lancement des Ouvres Nouvelles) organized the film, distribution was mostly limited to screenings for militants of the burgeoning anti-war movement. The film shows that Gilles' polarization of political documentary against art is too simplistically stark; it fulfills the instrumental political vocation of solidarity while it is also suffused with the artistic innovation we associate with the French New Wave. The film is organized in segments—powerful newsreel of bombing, footage shot with Vietnamese civilians and revolutionaries, an interview with Fidel Castro on the centrality of Vietnam and guerrilla war—and connected by Marker's narration. Contributions from Klein and Godard challenge the very cinematic act of solidarity we are watching. Godard appears on screen, hidden behind a camera, voicing, provocatively, gratingly, his doubts of what can be done—so far from Vietnam, where revolution was *really* occurring. Of course, the film was made in 1967, just months before May 68 would make revolution seem so much closer to France. Then the collapse of historical time coincided with the concentration of geographical space that imperialism and revolution appeared to accomplish, suddenly, clearly, connecting Vietnam and Paris. Seeing this film again, after years, was an invigorating excavation of an important example of politically and aesthetically powerful filmmaking.

In *Free Angela & All Political Prisoners*, Angela Davis echoes Assayas exactly: "we thought revolution was right around the corner." A long interview with the still eloquent and charismatic Davis organizes this entertaining documentary about the famed sixties revolutionary. Interspersed with newsreel footage, Davis recounts her radical education, her experience with the Communist Party and her persecution, flight, trial and acquittal; it is an emotional and exciting narrative. Davis, along with other black militants, is caught in the contradictions as the civil rights movement radicalizes in the later sixties and state repression escalates. The documentary is exciting and emotional but needed a more forceful political discussion. Just celebrating an icon of the sixties can become hagiographic and sentimental. While Davis does draw some sharp political distinctions between her Marxism and feminism and the nationalism and masculine bravado

of the Black Panthers, she is not asked to consider obvious, if difficult, issues of the futility of an armed political strategy, or the limitations of vanguardism in mass movements, or the connection between broad defensive coalitions and the goal of socialism. Davis would have powerful and interesting opinions to bring to such a discussion but the filmmakers appear to be aiming for a broader, less politically sophisticated audience. However, Assayas' fictional and personal dramatization illustrates that such issues can be taken on in an entertaining and challenging way. *Free Angela* fulfills a narrower, liberal function as a popularization of themes of continuing struggle and organization redolent still after decades.

The impact of the sixties could be seen in other examples. *Far from Afghanistan* is specifically inspired by, and in homage to, *Loin du Vietnam*. A group of contemporary filmmakers contribute segments of a collective film, protesting the more recent imperialist degradations of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan by the Western powers led by the United States. Like the earlier film, there is powerful use of newsreel footage of bombing and what we have come to call collateral damage. Noam Chomsky provides a succinct introduction to the politics of empire. Other segments poignantly suggest the war has come home in painful ways in American poverty and in the suicidal anguish of veterans. A Soviet documentary from the seventies is used to ironic effect. Other segments focused on formal meditations on images are less successful and the distance from the politically charged lively formal inventiveness of the New Wave in the earlier film is obvious. But overall, the film is a moving and interesting salute to and continuation of a radical lineage.

One sixties film I did not see; that icon of Hollywood liberalism, Robert Redford portrays a Weatherman—the sixties distillation of the end of the anti-war movement and the attraction of political violence—still underground and on the run after decades, in *The Company You Keep*. So cinematic dramatization of the uses and failures of political violence, the role of vanguardist organizations in mass movements, the painful costs of activism and social change—loved and reviled, the sixties redux—will be coming to your multiplex soon.

Cristian Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills*

REALISM AND THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

By FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ

The screening of a restored *Stromboli* at TIFF 2012 was, without a doubt, a highlight of the festival. Rossellini's radical aesthetic, which created the mode of the fictional essay on a particular time and place, was entirely new. The Bergman collaborations in particular, critical commentaries on the post-war climate of conformity, indifference, and reconstruction lacking a moral, humanist base, are still remarkably vital.

A few contemporary filmmakers are clearly indebted to the tradition forged by Rossellini and praised by Bazin. Kiarostami is an obvious example and he speaks extensively of his admiration for Rossellini in his documentary *10 on Ten*. His films continue to evidence his affinity for long takes intended to present reality and the unexpected details and rhythms that characterize it, and the frequent use of both professional and non-professional actors who embody a role but also seem completely natural to their surroundings. Mungiu is another and his latest tour de force, *Beyond the Hills*, would have been appreciated by the proponents of Realism. It is composed of long take sequence-shots that respect the natural flow of time and the details of location, including the seemingly unimportant moments and features two young actors who vivify their characters in a style that seems to extend beyond the construction of a performance (deservedly sharing Best Actress at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival). Alina /Cristina Flutur exteriorizes her character through a raw, aggressive physicality while Voichita/Coșmina Stratan conceals and safeguards her feelings behind her religious persona. In part, Mungiu is concerned with documenting a precise social landscape. In a press conference following the film's screening at the NYFF he emphasized the significance of details like the inflections of accent and dialect distinctive of the region of Romanian Moldova where the story takes place. He acknowledged the documentary basis of the story—an event that took place in 2005 involving a

young woman who returns to collect her friend who has become a novice in a monastery and ends up dead as a result of an exorcism performed on her to cure what those in the monastery perceive to be a possession. While the story of an exorcism in the 21st C (and, as Mungiu describes, the extreme, polarized responses it elicited in the real and virtual world) serves as a point of departure, Mungiu is adamant that he is using the incident as a context to create a drama that raises a number of concerns: most importantly, he says, it is a story about love (and different kinds of love) but also an examination of a climate of indifference, and one might add, intolerance and conformity. It is also about a culture that is fiercely 'religious' but deficient of basic humanist values, themes shared by Rossellini.

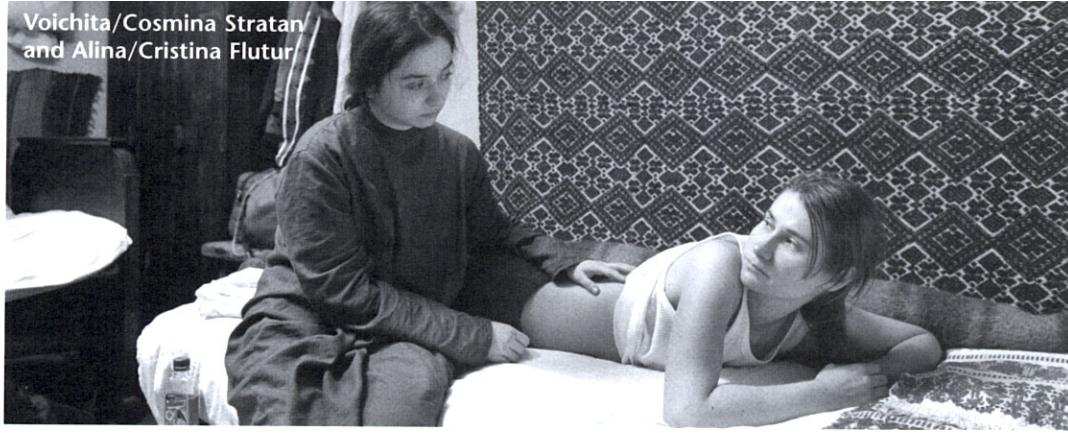
The love story is significantly at the heart of his film. Alina, the young woman who returns to Romania after a number of years of working abroad to reunite with the friend she loves, is confronted by the change resulting from Voichita's new-found commitment to God and the precepts defining the monastic community she has joined. Voichita's hesitation to leave what she sees as a home redefines the terms of the women's relationship and unleashes Alina's fury and subsequent unraveling. Alina's desire to reclaim Voichita's love and attention, usurped and redirected to the priest (whom she calls Father, or the endearment "Tati") and her religious devotion, is only achieved, finally, through the enactment of her suffering and death. Voichita's decision to free her, and possibly herself from the false refuge she has chosen arrives, as in the tradition of the lover in women's fiction, too late. The rules of the culture have vanquished them. In this sense *Beyond the Hills* is both a melodrama in the broader generic sense, and a document of a specific time and place.

Mungiu's concern with women's social victimization, and sensitivity to the importance of women's friendship also underpins his previous masterpiece, *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days*, but, as he notes, the films are otherwise quite distinct. In *Beyond the Hills*, the women lack education and met in an orphanage in the countryside. They are, in other words, completely disempowered and without protection. Voichita testifies to Alina's reliance on physical strength and the skills of self-defense to

protect herself and Voichita from abuse. A central theme, shared with the woman's film, is their total lack of place in the social world. One of Voichita's repeated pleas to Mother Superior/ Dana Tapalaga and the priest/Valeriu Andriuta in the monastery, and later to Alina, is her claim that the women have nowhere to go, and there is no one else to care for Alina, once she falls ill. Voichita doesn't consider Alina's vague plan to work on a boat, possibly as a waitress, as a viable plan. She has found a refuge in the monastery precisely because there are few options available. The point is illustrated in the narrative when a woman from the orphanage inquires about a place at the monastery because, after a certain age, she is expected to leave. The orphanage is also alluded to as a dangerous place for girls, requiring protection from sexual abuse or being exploited for pornography. Voichita is questioned about these allegations when she applies for a visa to work abroad, and while she concedes that they are true, she hesitates to file a formal complaint and an officer there comments how others too are reluctant to pursue charges. Another woman living in the monastery speaks of mourning the loss of a child, but the implication is that she is also escaping spousal abuse. When Alina is asked to leave the monastery to reflect on whether she is prepared to renounce all her material possessions, she tries returning to her foster home but finds that she has been replaced by another young woman who, like Alina, pays a percentage of her salary for her upkeep (or, in Alina's case, for the storage of her few belongings). Her parting advice to the new girl who has replaced her is a warning, "make sure they don't cheat you".

Visually the monastery is a place apart, a small, gated encampment that looks like a hiding place, presented in tones of blues and grays. Voichita argues that she has found a home, but Alina sees it more as a place where she avoids living. The monastery is a kind of foster home, presided over by a patriarchal Father who has the final word on every decision, both practical and spiritual while the women are seen doing the arduous physical work. Despite the monastery's good deeds of feeding children and others in need, it lacks the

Voichita/Cosmina Stratan
and Alina/Cristina Flutur



Domestic labour in
the monastery

approval of the Bishop, who has refused to consecrate the church. The excuse given, that it has not been properly painted, sounds like a hesitation on the part of the orthodox hierarchy to recognize its legitimacy and the authority of its priest. The priest is consumed with winning the respect of the locals in their preparation for the upcoming holiday of Easter, who will attend the church at the monastery and witness their work up close, as a means of securing the approval of the Bishop. He resists Alina's presence even before her breakdown because he feels threatened by her independence and intuits that she can be a disruptive, intrusive presence and challenge to his authority.

The priest's authority is bolstered by religious-based superstition which he both encourages when it serves him, Voichita tells of the vision he had of an angel while working at a power plant, and the miraculous powers he enacts through the icon he guards behind the altar, and discourages when it doesn't, as when he shows his frustration with a nun who becomes hysterical at the sight of what she perceives to be a black cross in the wood of a log she is chopping. The narrative is full of examples of how primitive beliefs colour the perception of daily life, as when the nuns attribute a husband's infidelity to

the witchcraft used by the woman who seduced him and the proximity of the couple's apartment to a cemetery, or the young girl in the bed next to Alina's in the hospital during her initial visit, who has attempted suicide because she is fifteen and has not yet menstruated. Alina's symptoms are constantly understood in relation to her rebellious nature and her challenge to patriarchal religious authority. The church's interpretation discounts social abuse and privileges sinning or, in the worse case scenario, signs of the devil. Following Alina's first episode of banging her head and attempting to jump in the well, a nun surmises that she might be hiding a greater sin, but Voichita asks incisively whether Alina has mentioned, in confession, the self-abuse. The comment is telling because Alina's episodes manifest the symptoms of self-abuse—biting, scratching, lighting fires etc.—which can be attributed to a history of abuse and trauma which she has experienced.

At one of the lighter points in the narrative, Alina tries to placate Voichita and resecure her love, and agrees to pray and confess, steadily marking off the 464 sins the nuns read off to her, looking exasperated by the exercise. Alina is a difficult figure of identification because she can't dissimulate her emotions and disregards the effect this may

have in a social context. Voichita is more adept at negotiating the world around her by revealing as little as is necessary and tries to temper Alina's displays of emotion. The film's opening dialogue, spoken at the train station upon Alina's arrival as a response to her tearful embrace, is Voichita's admonition, "Calm down, Alina. Let me go. People are looking." She goes on to advise, "I haven't yet told anyone. Don't say anything". Voichita's religiosity is another strategy of avoiding emotional expressiveness; she interiorizes, and chooses to invest her love in God, revealing her reservations about committing to Alina who has reappeared after a number of years. "People come and go" she explains at one point. "God is always there."

Some of the two women's initial scenes together suggest Alina is trying to revive a physical, sexual component in the relationship that they may have shared in the past. When she removes her top so that Voichita can give her body a rub down with alcohol to treat a fever, Voichita is almost fearful of touching Alina and avoids touching her, claiming she is tired and will go to pray. She also initially discourages sharing a bed with her. Later on, Voichita caresses Alina in bed, hugging her as they lie side by side, while she rocks her and

sings a lullaby, suggesting a profound love that they share. The song ends and Alina cries. The scene is touching and poignant in the way it depicts a ritual of mutual protection, expressing a love that goes beyond the categories of friend, lover or family member. When Alina is first hospitalized and the doctor asks her if she has returned from abroad because she missed home, she answers simply, "It's her I missed", a statement which sums up her desperate love for Voichita.

When Voichita first asks for permission to leave the monastery for a short time to help her friend who she worries is emotionally unstable, the priest is adamant in his refusal, "I thought you've chosen." "The man who leaves isn't the same when he returns." He presents her with the ultimatum that if she leaves, she cannot return. Despite this refusal Voichita applies for a visa to travel to Germany, suggesting that she is, nonetheless, still considering the plan to leave. When she returns to the room and finds Alina packing her things she tells her that Father won't take her back if she goes and so she has decided to remain. Alina interprets this as abandonment and having been replaced. The priest's intransigence sets the battle lines.

Alina's resentment of patriarchal authority, and her despair of losing Voichita result in her accusation that the claim of a holy icon kept behind the altar is a lie the priest exploits to control the nuns and keep them subservient to him. Her explosive fury culminates with her challenge, "Want to fuck me Father?" The priest's acquiescence in performing an exorcism as a cure is an extreme choice fraught with danger and risk that requires familial consent (Alina's mentally handicapped brother is consulted and even he breaks down in tears) and is hastened by the fear of exposure to the local villagers and the pressure of the approach of Easter. Ironically the exorcism turns into a crucifixion, and the church's fundamental precepts of charity and selflessness are compromised by intolerance and motives of self-preservation. As Alina's suffering intensifies, Voichita begins to doubt the efficacy of an exorcism given the brutality it demands. Alina, chained to a cross, suffers the deprivation of basic human needs under the guise of weakening the devil. Seeing Voichita's increasing agitation, Mother Superior and the priest send her outside alone in the cold, snow-covered landscape to

stand watch and report the approach of outsiders. Mungiu's decision to shoot in winter intensifies the film's themes of isolation, indifference and conformity. The intense cold of the chapel where Alina lies chained visualized in the vapor of a character's breath, the shots of nuns clearing a path in the heavy snow or moving like an amorphous flock of black birds in long shot, resonate with a remarkable beauty and melancholy.

In the final scenes, Voichita's mounting doubts are dramatized in a scene where she searches for the key to unlock the chains that bind Alina and implores her to leave. The scene is played out ambiguously, almost as a dream. Voichita falls asleep and is awoken by a nun who claims that Alina is now calm and asking for her. They soon discover that she is having trouble breathing and is dying, and finally take her to the hospital. Following Alina's death, Voichita's alienation is expressed subtly—she is wearing Alina's pullover and her hair is no longer covered like the other nuns. She is facing the camera and answers the police inspector's questions directly and candidly regarding Alina's physical state and her having been bound and gagged. She also offers to join those who will meet with the prosecutor.

While the doctor at the hospital expresses her disgust with what she perceives to be a murder, the film is more ambiguous about apportioning blame. The hospital, as the Mother Superior notes, also tied Alina to her bed during her first visit, and released her prematurely into the care of the monastery. Ultimately no place is safe and the film indicts a culture where poor disenfranchised women are vulnerable. Mungiu is criticizing a country steeped in religious ritual and regulation but devoid of a genuine concern for others. It is also complicated by the apathy and complacency of modern life, and in this sense the film is less about an incident than a state of malaise. The final scene takes place in the police inspector's car where the group awaits the prosecutor who has been delayed. One of the inspectors mentions he has been called to the crime scene of a young man who has stabbed his mother and posted photos of the event on the Internet. "What a state the world's in" he says, and the film's final shot of slush smearing the windshield, sums it up succinctly.

Liz Garbus' Love, Marilyn

By RICHARD LIPPE

August 5, 2012 was the 50th anniversary of Marilyn Monroe's death. The occasion had been acknowledged earlier this year at the Cannes Film Festival with a 1956 image of Monroe blowing out a candle on a cake chosen as the Festival's signature photograph. The year has included the release of a seven film Blu-ray box set of most of her major films. In addition, at least a half dozen of new books devoted to her have been published; these works range from *Marilyn/Magnum*, a collection of photographs taken by a number of the agency's most prestigious photographers, Laurence Schiller's *Marilyn and Me*, an over-sized volume that primarily features photographs taken on the set of *Something's Got to Give* that is priced at \$1,200., Christopher Nickens and George Zeno's *Marilyn in Fashion* to Keith Badman's *The Final Days of Marilyn Monroe*. In *Love, Marilyn*, we are told that over one thousand books have been published on Monroe, a number that continues to grow.

Considering the media attention the anniversary has received, Liz Garbus' feature length documentary *Love, Marilyn*, is appropriate as a 2012 TIFF screening. Since Monroe's death, there have been numerous documentaries on her life and career, several narrative dramatizations made for television and, more recently, the theatrically released *My Week with Marilyn* (2011). In contrast to the previous Monroe documentaries, *Love, Marilyn* is distinguished by having a celebrated documentarian as its writer-director. Garbus received an Academy Award nomination for *The Farm: Angola, USA* (1998) and in 2011, a nomination for *Killing in the Name*. In 2011, she also directed *Bobby Fischer against the World*, her first biographical documentary. The producer of the *Bobby Fischer* film, Stanley Buchthal, also one of the producers of *Love, Marilyn* was responsible for bringing the Monroe project to Garbus' attention.¹ Previously Buchthal, along with Bernard Comment, co-edited *Fragments: Poems, Intimate Notes, Letters by Marilyn Monroe*,² a book which contains writings by Monroe that were uncovered by Anna Strasberg, Lee Strasberg's

New York City, 1956. Marilyn, in an airport limousine, celebrates her 30th birthday.



widow, about ten years ago. *Love, Marilyn*, (the film's title is taken from a letter Monroe wrote to Lee Strasberg probably, according to the book's editors, in early 1956, thanking him for his help and encouragement) uses a selection of the writings to illustrate aspects of Monroe's identity.

In the above-cited article, Garbus says she felt that Monroe's writings displayed a multi-faceted personality and that casting a number of actresses would benefit the project. To that end, she chose Elizabeth Banks, Ellen Burstyn, Glenn Close, Viola Davis, Jennifer Ehle, Lindsay Lohan, Janet McTeer, Marisa Tomei, Lili Taylor, Uma Thurman, and Evan Rachel Wood to read from *Fragments*. She describes the exercise as: "...very much a collaborative process because they're not performing Marilyn, they're not *being* Marilyn, they are bringing out the various facets of Marilyn with their energies – calm, collected, frantic...all of those different energies – but they are still themselves."³ In addition, Garbus cast actors to read written commentaries of men who were, to a greater or lesser degree, relevant to Monroe's life. These include: Arthur Miller/David Strathairn, Elia Kazan/Jeremy Piven, Truman Capote/Adrien Brody, Norman Mailer/Ben Foster, Billy Wilder/Oliver Platt, and George Cukor/Paul Giamatti. Writing on Monroe by Gloria

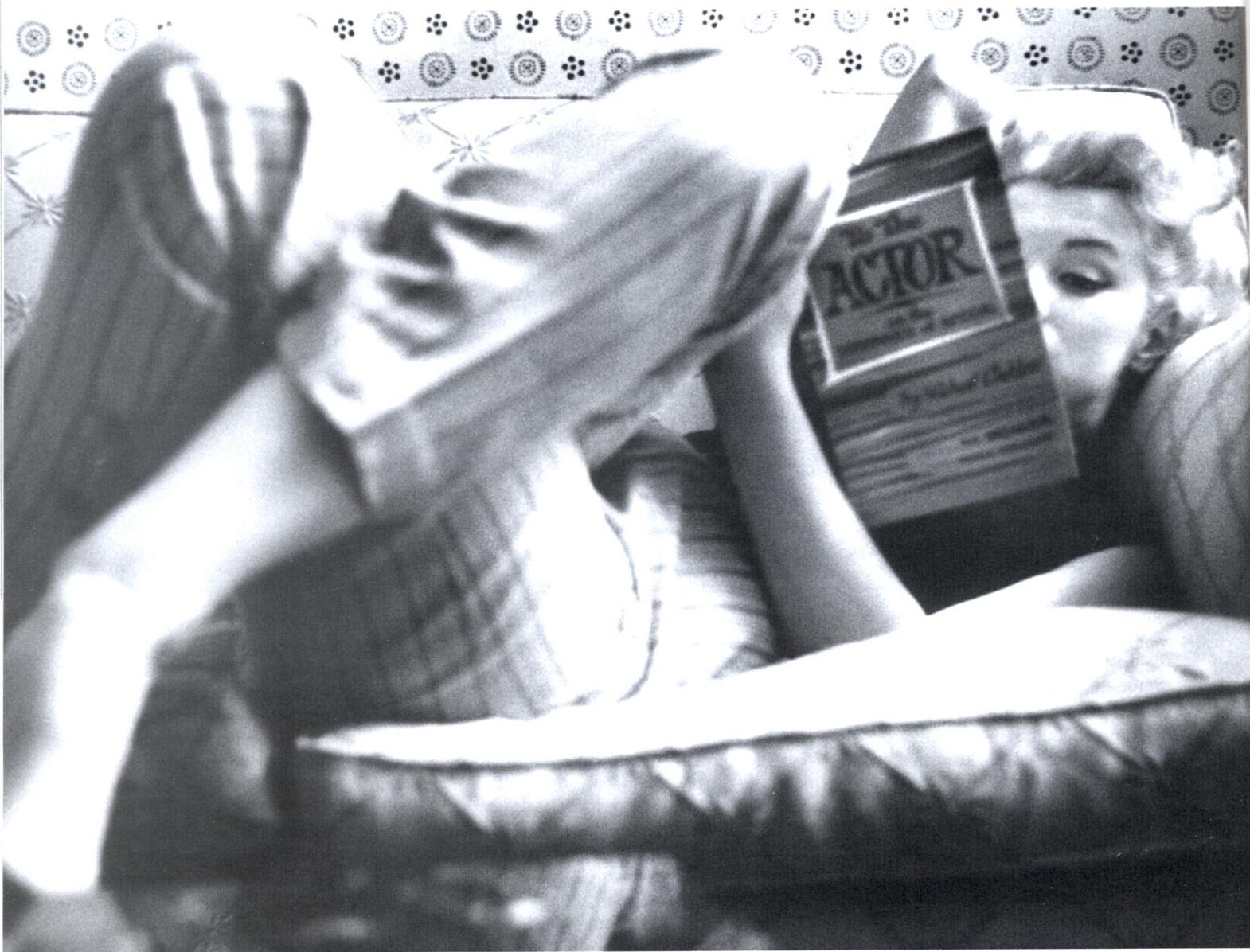
Steinem/Hope Davis is also included.

More traditionally, *Love, Marilyn* uses film footage and stills of Monroe, archival interviews with her and co-workers, contemporary interviews with celebrity friends Amy Greene, photographer Milton Greene's first wife, and photographer George Barris, biographers, Donald Spoto and Sarah Churchwell and critics, Molly Haskell, Thomas Schatz. Ellen Burstyn is interviewed on Lee Strasberg's 'sense-memory' approach to method acting.

Suffice to say, *Love, Marilyn* offers a lot to digest. This is compounded by the fact that although *Fragments* is listed in the film's credits, the book's nature and film's specific usage of it aren't directly acknowledged. Arguably, Garbus' idea of casting a range of actors to embody the spirit of Monroe isn't a success. In part this occurs because of the sheer number of actors involved, with each offering their own conception of what they were given or chose to read. There is nothing that unifies the overall effect of this approach. The actors' readings wildly differ in performance style which tends to become an end in itself. At times the strongest impression given is that the actor is auditioning for an unspecified project. For instance, Marisa Tomei's intense, dramatic readings are attention getting but what she says doesn't have a context to give her effort meaning; in

contrast, Evan Rachel Wood's contemporary sensibility and ironic readings tend to jar with Tomei's character-orientated presentations. The results are distracting rather than engaging. Lindsay Lohan's readings are less interpretative but, with the way she wears her hair and the stylized make-up, she looks like a young Mamie Van Doren. Of the male actors, Ben Foster's Norman Mailer, a very demonstrative performance, seems to be an audition to play Kirk Douglas. Adrien Brody reading from Truman Capote's "A Beautiful Child" essay is effective as he doesn't attempt to impose himself on the material.

Unlike *Fragments*, which uses chapters with introductions to organize Monroe's writings, *Love, Marilyn* takes a random approach to the book's material. *Fragments* is a rewarding book if the reader wants to gain a better sense of who Monroe was beyond the media image that has been constructed since her death. The book doesn't 'explain' Monroe or our contemporary fascination with her but instead provides a partial portrait of an intelligent and creative human being. *Love, Marilyn* relies instead on Monroe mythology. For instance, the film claims her success was due to the publication of the Tom Kelley nude calendar and her refusal to publicly apologize for it. While Monroe's handling of the incident was bold and helped promote her career, it



cannot be seen as being responsible for Monroe's stardom. Without *Niagara*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, her screen presence and performances, Monroe wouldn't have achieved the public support she had in the early '50s.

A fundamental issue with Garbus' use of *Fragments* is the basis of the film's conception. She seems to use the book as a means of having Monroe directly connect to the viewer. On the other hand, there is her position as the film's writer and director. From that perspective, Garbus at times gives the impression that she is offering an objective presentation of her subject. This is evident in her handling of Monroe's attachment to Lee Strasberg but even more so in her treatment of Monroe

and Arthur Miller. Using archival footage, the relationship is initially depicted as providing a vulnerable Monroe with a sense of acceptance and happiness. This image is soon followed with footage that shows Miller in a negative light; he publicly announces their forthcoming marriage (without having asked her to marry him) at a press conference dealing with his subpoena to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The follow-up to the denouncement of Miller is a very brief piece of archival footage in which Eve Arnold (speaking from her experience as a still photographer on the set of *The Misfits*) says Monroe was mean to Miller. Finally, archival footage features Miller defending his negative portrayal of Monroe in *After the Fall*, claim-

ing that his intention was to illustrate her inability to be tolerant of shortcomings in others. Garbus ostensibly provides a 'balanced' account of the trajectory of their relationship by offering a chronicle of events. By doing so, she undermines the notion that *Love, Marilyn* has a personal voice, be it that of Monroe's or her own.

Garbus, discussing her differing approaches to the Fischer and Monroe projects, says "For Marilyn it's the opposite, actually, I felt I didn't have that obligation [to history to tell the full story] at all... I had an obligation to bring my own point of view to these documents, but I didn't need to cover every biographical beat..."⁴ It isn't fully clear what Garbus means with these claims. For instance, in dealing with

Monroe's marriage to Joe DiMaggio, the film raises the issue of his Italian background and desire that Monroe be a traditional wife. In that context, cooking is addressed with stock footage of Italian women ravenously eating pasta; it is followed with a clip of Monroe who, in response to an interviewer asking if she cooks for DiMaggio, smiles and says she can grill a steak. As commentary on the marriage and domesticity, Evan Rachel Wood coyly recites a recipe found in *Fragments*, the implication being that Monroe was collecting recipes at that time in her life. But, in fact, there are no references to DiMaggio in the book; the recipe Wood reads was selected by Monroe for a formal dinner party she was giving while living in Manhattan. Garbus toys playfully with the mismatched coupling but at the expense of both DiMaggio and Monroe. In this instance, the impression given is that Monroe's voice can be used to suit her needs.

Aside from freely using the texts of *Fragments*, Garbus, in the film's most emotionally charged segment, uses Monroe stills and footage with a disregard for the materials' historical context. An account of the actor's brief 1961 incarceration in New York's Payne Whitney Clinic, an institution for the mentally disturbed, is climaxed with a series of images of a distraught Monroe taken from a wide range of sources, including *River of No Return* and *Bus Stop* stills. The rapid collage of images of a suffering and pained Monroe seem to be intended to create an empathetic response from the viewer. The Payne Whitney Clinic episode is the film's most extreme attempt to identify itself with Monroe.

Arguably, the most distressing aspect of the subjectivity Garbus is attempting to achieve is her blatant manipulation of Monroe imagery. In keeping with *Love, Marilyn*'s overall up beat trajectory, the sequence has an epilogue which shows a radiant looking Monroe in a wheelchair as she is being escorted out of a hospital to face a mob of photographers. This footage, contrary to its implication, was taken later in 1961 as Monroe left a Manhattan hospital after having had gall bladder surgery.

A possible reason why Garbus takes such liberties in her depiction of Monroe may be a desire to present her as a heroine. From an image of Monroe triumphing over the Payne Whitney

Clinic experience, the film moves onto Monroe's return to Los Angeles and the making of *Something's Got to Give*. The New York years, 1955–1961, which were the most turbulent years of Monroe's adult life, set the stage for what is to come in her return to Hollywood. Garbus acknowledges Monroe's precarious mental state by making Dr. Ralph Greenson, the Los Angeles psychiatrist she engaged, a performed character in the film. Again, she uses still images of Monroe taken out of context, in this instance from a 1961 photographic session with Doug Kirkland, to depict her fragile condition. While she references Monroe's erratic behaviour and physical health problems during the shooting of *Something's Got to Give* and her being fired by Fox Studios because of it, her primary concern is Monroe's campaign to get back in touch with her public, the people who made her a star. Monroe sets up interviews and photo shoots to counter the claims that she is no longer able to function professionally. In *Love, Marilyn*, Garbus depicts Monroe as a survivor. Her death in August, 1962 and the circumstances surrounding it are lightly touched upon. The film concludes with a celebratory and somewhat inspirational tone. It's a sentimental ending that suggests Marilyn Monroe, as person and iconic image, is a life force.

Love, Marilyn, with its large cast of contemporary actresses, female commentators, and both Liz Garbus and Marilyn Monroe as authors, qualifies as having a feminist agenda. Perhaps this is what Garbus intended. If so, I think the film needs to be clearer about its intentions and what it wants to say. *Love Marilyn*, by its conclusion, comes closer to a retelling of the American Dream—through a combination of determination and hard work, self-actualization and success is possible. Marilyn Monroe's story is very much a product of American mythology but it is more than that. Sarah Churchwell's book, *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe*⁵, is an excellent piece of critical writing on the Monroe mythology, particularly the entrenched notion of the split between the Norma Jeane Baker and Marilyn Monroe personas. Churchwell rejects this biographical construction and argues that Monroe's subjectivity and an individual's perception of her identity shouldn't be collapsed. In contrast, Garbus tends to adhere to the conven-

tional image of Monroe and her identity.

As I have indicated, I object on both scholarly and personal grounds to the disregard for accuracy in *Love, Marilyn*. Is it assumed that the viewer doesn't notice or doesn't care? This practice seems common in the contemporary biographical documentary and most likely has a longstanding tradition. TIFF 2012 featured a side bar of several newly restored prints, including Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950). Seeing the film as it was meant to look greatly enhanced the experience of viewing this remarkable film. Accompanying the screening was a recently produced fifty-two minute documentary, Francesco Patierno's *The War of the Volcanoes*, which explored the making of *Stromboli* and William Dieterle's *Volcano* (1950), an attempt by Anna Magnani to rival her former lover's project. *The War of the Volcanoes* contains rare documentary footage and is at times fascinating and informative. Nevertheless, the film uses outrageous tactics to make its points. For example, after establishing that the real life Magnani was a highly emotional person who acted out her feelings, the film features a telephone scene from the Rossellini-Magnani film, *L'Amore*. Patierno doesn't identify the footage and apparently wants the viewer to think this is an example of the actor just being herself. Later, Ingrid Bergman is also subjected to a misuse of footage to make a point about her personal involvement with Rossellini. Using candid footage, undoubtedly taken later in her life, he shows an aged Bergman in a public space looking gaunt and distressed as she attempts to shield herself from scrutiny. It makes one question the intentions of the film's director when he resorts to such heavy-handed ploys.

With *Love, Marilyn* and *The War of the Volcanoes* artistic license is used as a means to privilege the entertainment factor over the seriousness of the film's subject matter.

Notes

- 1 <http://realscreen.com/2012/09/12/tiff-12-acts-of-love-as-garbus-takes-on-monroe>
Interview by Adam Benzine, 1.
- 2 Buchthal, Stanley and Bernard Comment, (eds.) *Fragments: Poems, Intimate Notes, Letters by Marilyn Monroe*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- 3 Benzine, 2.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Churchwell, Sarah, *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005.

Post Tenebras Lux

"WHY DO PEOPLE NEED EXPLANATIONS?"

By SUSAN MORRISON

Of all the films I saw at this year's TIFF, the one that impressed me the most was Carlos Reygadas's *Post Tenebras Lux*. This was the first film I had seen by the Mexican director, and selected it partly out of curiosity... I knew that he had a dedicated following of serious critics (cf. Cinema Scope 50), but also because I have an attraction to films with Latin titles. Having already seen TIFF's other Latin-titled film, *Thermae Romae*, a jaw-droppingly silly film from Japan whose protagonist, an architect specializing in building Roman baths, inadvertently time-travels between Ancient Rome and contemporary Tokyo, thereby jumpstarting his lagging career by his periodic inspirational confrontations with 21st century state-of-the-art Japanese bathroom design, (including a toilet that not only opens and closes by itself, but also plays classical music), I can't say I was prepared in any way for the audacity that was *Post Tenebras Lux*.

During the film's long opening scene, some 15 minutes in length, the viewer is gradually made aware that this will not unfold as a conventional film. A little girl, perhaps 2 years old, well-dressed in a down vest and striped jersey, toddles along towards the camera, babbling away indecipherably for the most part, save for her identifying with apparent glee the animals around her...cows, horses, dogs. Long shots interspersed with medium shots and close-ups reveal the location to be a muddy meadow, and we soon note with some apprehension given her age, that there are no adults present. Eventually, the sky begins to darken and the wind seems to rise up; but still no adult arrives on the scene. The little girl continues to move aimlessly, babbling through the field. The sky turns black, we see lightning flashes and hear thunder...the animals become more agitated in their movements...and still no adult arrives to take her home. The trajectory thus established has taken us from sunshine into darkness, from safety into danger, from pastoral reverie into nightmare. This scene is not just prescient of what is to come, but also, the embodied antithesis of the revelato-

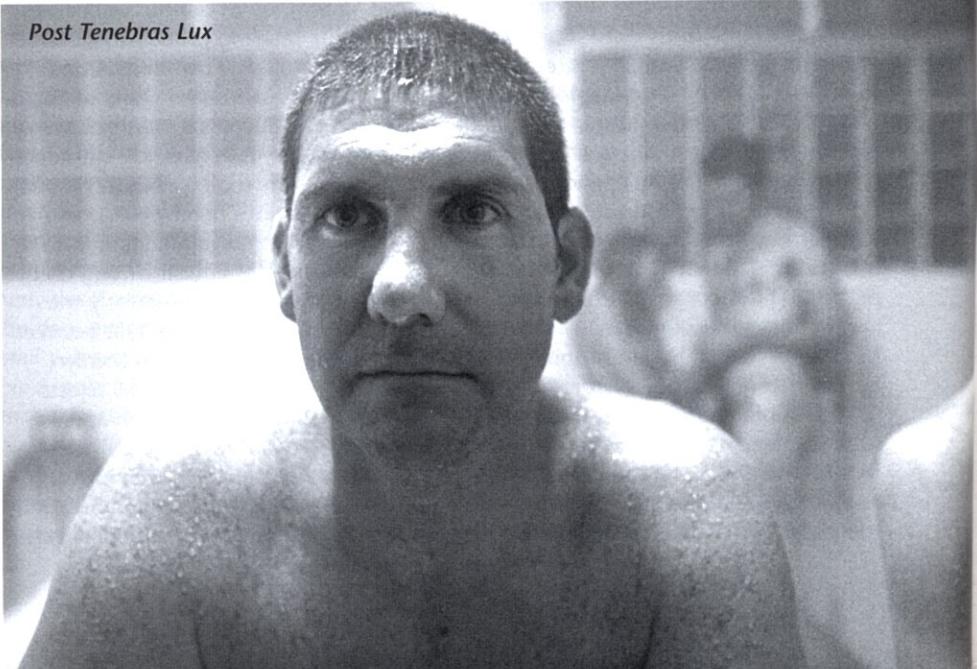
ry implication of the title (After Darkness, Light).

Presently, and somewhat as a relief to the anxiety and tension built up in the opening, the film cuts to the darkened interior of a house, whose occupants, a young boy and his parents, are revealed asleep in their own rooms, seemingly oblivious to the absence of the little girl and her presumed danger. Narrative convention leads us to expect this is her family, and that they will awaken and discover her missing (although there is that nagging thought that they should have realized this before they went to sleep). We the audience are obviously still in another film, not Reygadas's, for what happens next is the first clue that we're not in Kansas anymore. The camera holds on a shot of the hallway with the front door at the back, facing us. The door slowly and ominously opens, and in walks a tall red glowing animated figure, part goat (head, legs, tail) part humanoid (upright torso and arms), referencing a devil, perhaps Satan himself. This portentous creature lumbers towards us, and we notice two things: first, that he's holding a long black box by the handle in one hand...definitely a 'whatztit'. (I initially took it for a doctor's bag, but the director has identified it as a tool box.) And second, he is presented as emphatically male, with large male genitalia that swing noticeably and disconcertingly as he lumbers through the house. He peers into the boy's room—the door is slightly ajar—and we see the little boy, now standing, looking back. The satanic figure closes the door and moves on to the next one, further back, opens it, looks in and moves on to the

third one, at the back right side.

Now, this is quite a startling experience for the viewer, whose suspension of disbelief has to kick in quite quickly for it not to seem risible. While the opening scene presented us with a lovely natural image (little girl in field with farm animals) that eventually turned ominous through its extension and natural intervention, the second one, also beginning realistically, (family peacefully asleep in their home) is transformed by an ominous, supernatural insertion. What is more disturbing however, is that both are left as unmotivated events, unexplained, dangling within that part of the narrative that could be called 'coherent'. Neither scene is followed through to any explanation during the course of the film, (although the second is repeated later on, with the satanic figure this time going on to enter the far bedroom, closing the door behind him). This serves as an early indicator that, in *Post Tenebras Lux*, the dividing line between reality and fantasy is deliberately being blurred. The first scene appears to be a real event; the second, also, could be 'diegetically real' if *Post Tenebras Lux* is going to be, for example, a horror film. When the family in the second scene fail to react to the little girl's absence, we start to wonder whether the first scene had in fact really taken place or perhaps it was just a character's anxiety dream. Similarly, when the satanic figure's presence in the house is never linked to any subsequent narrative event, we again begin to question whether it actually happened, or whether it too was intended as an

Post Tenebras Lux



imaginary and symbolic occurrence. An unusual technical feature of the film that literalizes this blurring of boundaries between real and imaginary actions is utilized in the very first scene: the camera lens appears to be out of focus around its periphery, so the image is sharper at the centre, fuzzy at the edges, often accompanied by a 'ghosting' effect. In fact, this is not a temporary conceit, for Reygadas continues to use this effect throughout the film whenever shooting outdoor scenes. Thus nature itself is made unnatural, a figment of his imaginary.

After these two opening scenes, *Post Tenebras Lux* concerns itself more or less with the quotidian existence of an attractive young upper middle class family that has recently moved into a large new house situated in a remote part of the Mexican countryside. We discover that Rut, their young daughter, is in fact the little girl from the first scene; Eleazar, the slightly older son, is the boy who saw the devil in the second scene, and Natalia and Juan, the parents, are the couple who slept through the devil's visit.¹ Much of the family's story is portrayed in a quasi-documentary style, the (non-professional) actors appearing very natural and real before the cameras as they go about their daily lives.

Even so, there are enough narrative discrepancies which crop up through the course of the film to further disturb and discombobulate. Juan, the loving father, beats up the family dog quite viciously, and not for the first time, we are informed. At an AA-like support group meeting of Mexican peasants, Juan, brought and introduced by 'Seven', a former thief who did some work for him, diffidently admits to an Internet porn addiction. In a particularly strange scene reminiscent of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Juan and Natalia, clad only in towels, search through a number of rooms (jokingly called Hegel and Duchamp), in what appears to be a bathhouse, where fully and partially naked middle class adults young and old, sit or stand, watching sexual acts that we the viewers are not shown. Natalia is chosen by 2 men as their 'victim/playmate'. She drops her towel and lies down with her head in the lap of an older woman, who gently soothes her while the men use her for their sexual purposes. Again, that takes place, Warhol-style, off camera. We see only

her face as it responds to the men's actions and the older woman's caresses. It's incredibly voyeuristic—Juan and the others, watching; we the audience watching them and Natalia. Adding to our discomfort is that we have no idea when or where this scene is taking place, or if in fact, it actually happened. Is it before Juan and Natalia were married? Or after? In Mexico or Europe (they're speaking French rather than Spanish)? Or is it another imaginary scene? This removal of temporal and locational markers that permit viewers to find and maintain their place in a film's narrative is another destabilizing device Reygadas uses on a number of occasions throughout *Post Tenebras Lux*. In the same vein, there are two short scenes inserted into the film, one in the middle and the other at the end, that depict English schoolboys playing a game of rugby. Unlike the film's opening 2 scenes which had some connection to Juan and his family, (even if we're not certain whether they are imaginary or real), these have no connection with the rest of the film; no character is identified or identifiable, the shift in location from Mexico to England is not explained. They have been dropped in without any kind of narrative linkage. It's left up to us to figure out why they're there.

In terms of Reygadas's disinclination to allow the viewer to watch the film unfold as a coherent narrative, he employs two more conceits that are intended to disrupt and disturb. The first is connected to the non-linear achronological structure of the film's timeline. In the midst of the film's linear narrative concerning Juan, Natalia and their two little children, Reygadas inserts a scene early on where Rut and Eleazar have grown into teenagers, and are at a family party with their parents. This scene is thrown into question later on, near the film's end, when after Juan has been shot by Seven during a house break-in, Rut, toddler-aged, informs the inquiring Seven that her father has died from his wounds.

This leads to the second conceit, perhaps the most audacious scene in the entire film, one that equals the CGI'd Satan in its effect on the viewer, where, at the end of the film, a central character, full of rage and despair, stands with his back to us, hands to his head, as if to scream in anguish, yet instead, literally pulls off his head.

"So what is it about?" (a female journalist) asks me.
"Thank you. That is the best compliment I could ever receive!" was my answer. "You can't describe what my film is about? That's excellent."²

So what are we to make of all this? While Reygadas won the best director award at Cannes for this film, most of the critical reviews have been harshly negative, taking him to task for producing either an incomprehensible mess of an art-film or an intensely personal film that precludes any possibility of connecting with its audience. My feeling is that there is something else going on here. In his own defence, Reygadas cites James Joyce and Franz Kafka as predecessors, referring us back to the avant garde struggles fought at the beginning of the twentieth century.

But Reygadas is not the only contemporary filmmaker producing remarkable films in which narrative coherence is suspended in the name of art; in other words, filmmakers who have been willing to forego narrative clarity and realism for an alternate effect that is more experiential than logical. There seems to be a kind of revival of interest among artists in experimenting with the form of film even if it means at the expense of meaning. Recent films like Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*, Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master*, and Leos Carax's *Holy Motors* require the viewer to relinquish pre-conceived notions of what a film may be. It seems to me that *Post Tenebras Lux*, like other challenging works of art, needs to be experienced with an open mind and a willingness to accept visual and narrative idiosyncrasies. Perhaps, as Susan Sontag said a long time ago, interpretation isn't necessarily the only way of responding to art.

Notes

1 To further complicate matters, *Post Tenebras Lux* has enough autobiographical elements to make the viewer wonder where the dividing point is drawn between the real and the imaginary: the little girl and boy are played by Rut and Eleazar Reygadas, the director's children. His wife is also named Natalia; the house in which the fictional Juan and Natalia live is Reygadas's own, which he built some distance from Mexico city. Reygadas went to school in England, where he played rugby.

2 Quoted from an interview with Reygadas at Cannes, May 28, 2012. Posted on fandor.com

Cinélatino Rencontres de Toulouse

By ALISON FRANK

Cinélatino Rencontres de Toulouse is a Latin American film festival that has been taking place annually for the past 24 years. In late March, spring has already taken hold in the south-western French city of Toulouse: in fact, it feels more like early summer, as daytime temperatures reach 24 degrees under cloudless skies, and restaurant terraces remain packed late into the night. The warm hues of Toulouse's architecture, a combination of wood, pink brick and peach plaster, combined with the balmy weather, make it easy to forget that you aren't in South America when you emerge from a screening.

Toulouse's affinity for Latin culture isn't arbitrary: the city is situated relatively close to the border with Spain and has a considerable population of hispanophones. The festival itself is not just of interest for those with a Spanish connection, though: each year Cinélatino invites the whole of Toulouse, plus many special guests from abroad, to celebrate Latin American culture for its own sake. In parallel with film screenings, often followed by director Q&As, there are nightly concerts, dance demonstrations, and public debates (or 'rencontres') with filmmakers and other experts.

Cinélatino has three competition sections: feature, documentary and short film. The festival's highest award is the Grand Prix Coup de Coeur for best feature, but there are a total of 12 awards to be won across the three categories. Like most festivals, Cinélatino invites juries made up of experts in the field, such as directors, producers, film critics and programmers from other festivals. While many festivals also give the general public a say by offering an audience award, Cinélatino goes one step further: in addition to its 'prix du public', the festival offers prizes awarded by railway

employees and electricians, as well as inviting a jury of university students to judge the short film competition. This year, for the first time, a high school students' jury awarded one of the prizes in the feature competition.

This year's Grand Prix went to *Los Últimos Cristeros* (*The Last Cristeros*, 2012), by Matías Meyer, a historical film about the peasant resistance against the anti-Catholic government of 1920s Mexico. Maintaining the focus on the past, the festival's audience award went to *Violeta se fue a los cielos* (*Violeta*, 2011), Andrés Wood's biopic of Chilean singer and artist Violeta Parra. Julia Murat's contemplative fiction feature *Histórias que só existem quando lembradas* (*Stories Which Only Exist When Remembered*, 2011) looked at a small village stuck in the past, and showed how its elderly population is affected by the arrival of a young photographer. This film won the hearts of both the railway employees' and electricians' juries. Armando Bo's more popularly-oriented *El Último Elvis* (*The Last Elvis*, 2012) won the French critics' award: this impeccably-constructed fiction feature centred on a man convinced that he is The King, and the impact of his delusions on his family life. Adam Isenberg's *Una Vida sin palabras* (*A Life Without Words*, 2011) took two of the three awards in the documentary category for its presentation of a group of deaf people in Nicaragua whose lives are transformed when they are taught a form of sign language unique to the region.

Most of the competition films had serious shortcomings in terms of style, script, or both. These shortcomings were mitigated by the fact that the films were only début or second features for many of the directors. The most impressive debut feature in competition was Dominga Sotomayor's *De Jueves a domingo* (*From Thursday to Sunday*, 2012), which follows a fami-

ly's 3-day car trip. Normally, it is the children's behaviour that causes headaches on long journeys, but here it is the parents who won't behave. The mother fumes silently when the father stops to pick up two attractive young hitch-hikers; he, in turn, becomes withdrawn when the mother runs into an old flame who is travelling the same way. There are clearly underlying problems with their marriage, which the audience picks up on through the parents' brief references to topics which are never fully explained. In essence, the audience is put in the same position as the children, and the parents, rather exasperatingly, are trying to shield us from the truth. Sotomayor's signature style is to communicate the separation between children and parents, and between the parents themselves, by using a variety of means to divide the frame into two distinct spaces.

Another striking debut was Eduardo Nunes's *Sudoeste* (*Southwest*, 2011), which took the FIPRESCI award. It is the strange story of baby whose mother dies before giving birth to her. The midwife (popularly considered a witch by the local villagers) rescues the baby, but her near-death experience seems to have compressed her existence. The baby grows up, grows old, and dies in the space of just one day. The film's opening has an oppressive aesthetic, and in terms of narrative, once it became clear that the protagonist's entire life would be one day long, the story lost all momentum. Happily, for about a third of the film's duration, the aesthetic brightens just as the narrative starts to draw the audience in. The majesty of the Brazilian coast with its blinding sun, clear water and white sands, and the ceaseless wind that combs the palms and grasses, acts as a perfect complement to the wonder of this mysterious, elusive central character as she lives through the most intense day of her life—the only day of her life.

Three films in competition were about middle class adolescents or twenty-somethings, uncertain about their future and very much absorbed in their own worlds. In *Al Cielo* (*In the Sky*, 2011, dir. Diego Prado), a teenage boy's mother pushes him to join a church youth group when the



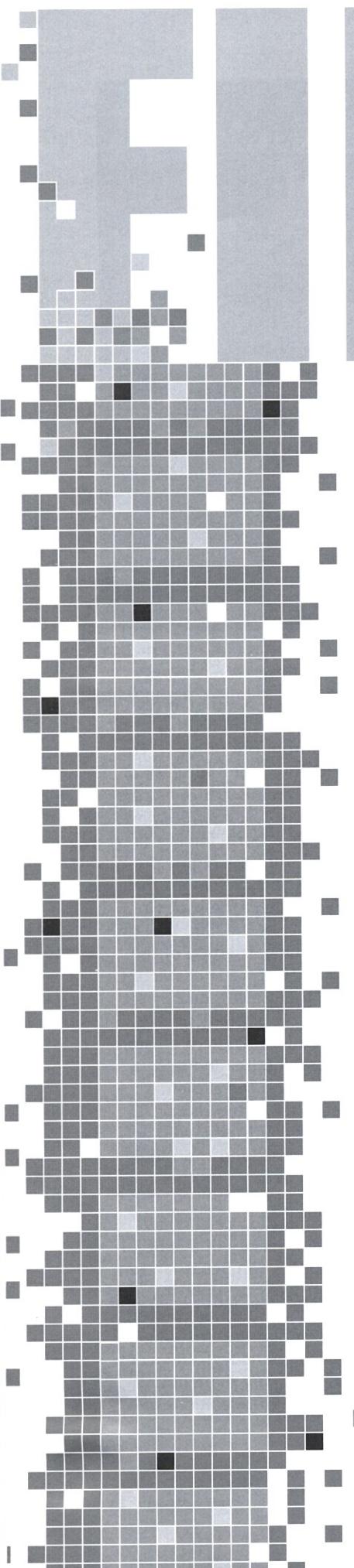
leader of his favourite punk rock band dies. *Un Mundo secreto* (*A Secret World*, 2012, dir. Gabriel Mariño) is the story of an introverted teenage girl who, the day she finishes high school, heads off on a road trip without telling her mother. *El Lenguaje de los machetes* (*The Language of Machetes*, 2011) focuses on a young couple torn between procreation and terrorism. The characters in these films tend not to share their thoughts; this can be exasperating, particularly in the case of *Un Mundo secreto*, where the character stares blankly into space rather than engaging in conversation with the people she meets. The common theme of characters who are enclosed in their own worlds (either their personal world, or the world of the romantic couple) was communicated by an aesthetic that bordered on the claustrophobic. In *El Lenguaje de los Machetes*, the dominance of extreme close-ups of the characters' faces gave the audience access to the couple's intimate world. *Un Mundo secreto*'s style balanced beautifully composed shots of the wider world with close-ups of the protagonist's profile: in these close-ups, the background was blurred to reflect the character's disconnection from her surroundings. *Al Cielo*

took this approach to extreme: often, a handheld camera was used to follow the main character, focusing on his back or the nape of his neck, while the rest of the shot remained out of focus, an approach which risked making the audience nauseous. It was difficult to sympathise fully with the characters in *Un Mundo secreto* and *El Lenguaje de los Machetes*, because the film did not give compelling enough reasons for their behaviour. All of these films were saved, to some degree, by the one connection that the characters were able to make with another human being.

Cinélatino presented an appealing variety in its out-of-competition programme: a retrospective of the surreal oeuvre of Alejandro Jodorowsky, an homage to the recently deceased Raúl Ruiz, a focus on the work of Brazilian cinematographer Walter Carvalho, a selection of shorts by female Cuban filmmakers, and an overview of contemporary independent Argentine cinema with special guest Albertina Carri. A particular highlight, amidst the more serious festival fare, was a section on Uruguayan comedy. This section included Juan Pablo Rebella's *Whisky* (2004), the story of the owner of a small sock factory who asks one

of his employees to stand in as his wife when his successful brother comes to visit from out of town. The film's subdued humour and sense of the absurd are reminiscent of Nordic comedies such as *Italian for Beginners* (2000): it is a slow burn, initially drawing its comedy from the highly predictable actions and exchanges that define everyday life in the sock workshop. The beauty of the film, though, is in its unassuming insertion of the unexpected: although the characters, just by being themselves, quickly settle into a new sort of predictability, moving them into a different environment (the boss's house, and later, a seaside resort) gives the audience space to get to know the characters better—in particular Marta, who acts as her boss's spouse, and soon sees why his more agreeable brother has got on so well in life.

This year Cinélatino celebrated the ten year anniversary of a joint initiative with Spain's San Sebastian Film Festival, which seeks to support young filmmakers to complete their projects and screen their films internationally. As this initiative continues, audiences can hope to see many more innovative new films at future editions of Cinélatino.



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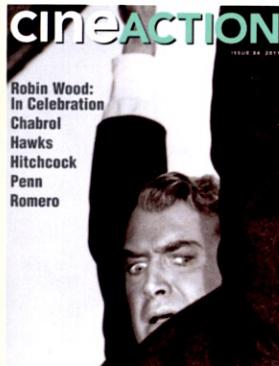
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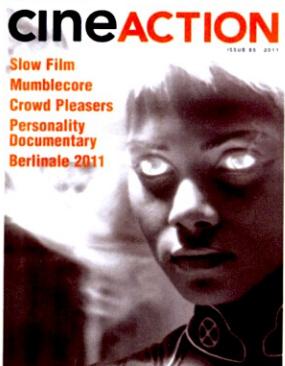
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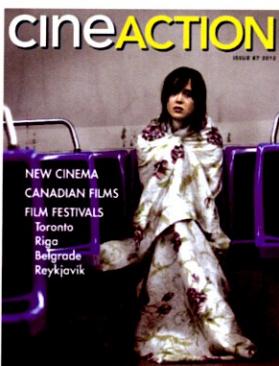
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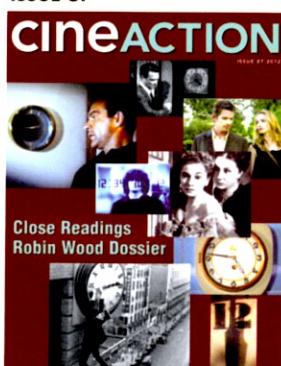
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